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ABSTRACT

The history of school district reorganization in New York State over the past 150 years is examined. Basic research tools included a survey of present and former district superintendents, contacts with former State Education Department personnel, and reports from other leading figures and past participants. Sections are included on: the historical perspective on reorganization in New York (outlining the legislation passed and battles encountered in consolidating the schools); how well the reorganization has worked (opinions for and against centralization and its success in maintaining academic standards and effective programs); success stories and trouble spots (as remembered by interviewees); and what comes next and what the future should be. This section on the future includes a summary and synthesis of the District Superintendents' open-ended responses, nearly 100% of whom feel equality of opportunity has not nearly been reached in New York State, partly due to the spotty success in achieving needed centralizations and that school improvement through reorganization of educationally and/or fiscally weak units cannot wait. A final section lists important dates in the development of reorganization in New York State. Each section contains quotes from various reports and from the interviewed superintendents and officials. Notes follow each section and a bibliography is appended. (JMM)

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Department of Education
New York State College of Agriculture & Life Sciences at
Cornell University

"If We Can Haul the Milk, We Can Haul the Kids"**

A Personalized History of School District Reorganization In New York State

by
Charles E. Davis, Ph.D.

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Organizational Alternatives for Small Rural Schools
In New York State*

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**The title is a quote from an old-time rural board member, as he viewed the value of school district reorganization.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In 1835, NY Secretary of State Dix wrote:

> The average number of children in our school districts is 55. No school district should number fewer than 40....In feeble districts cheap instructors, poor and ill-furnished schoolhouses, and a general languor of the cause of education are almost certain to be found.[1]

From a perspective of 150 years, this attempt to cover the high points, and a few low ones, of the history of school district reorganization in the Empire State may well be the most ambitious yet undertaken. Predictably there will be those who will say, "But you didn't talk to all the local superintendents, or most of the board presidents, or very many people." No, we did not talk to everyone, nor did we compare SAT scores, examine how many boys played football, or talk to the dead (although we received many messages from them, courtesy of their children, other relatives and/or companions).

There have been many theses and dissertations on various aspects of reorganization, or centralization as it was long called in polite society. Only a few, however, have been completed in the last 30 years and none apparently has attempted the historical perspective or specific detail of this project.

Why have we done it--and why now? Of what use can it possibly be?

The Rural Schools Program under William H. Deming's able leadership has spawned many ideas since its inception in 1979. In 1983 a Research Committee was appointed and Davis/McDonald Associates employed to come up with ideas for worthwhile projects.

Richard J. McDonald and Charles E. Davis, both recently retired district superintendents who had much experience with small districts, felt that a new look was needed in the time-honored but perhaps jaded State approach to reorganization.

Fortunately David H. Monk, a Cornell professor, was a member of the research committee; he had been focusing on rural school problems for several years, especially financial areas. The committee liked the idea and suggested that the three men, Monk, McDonald and Davis, prepare a proposal to seek funding for such a study.

State Education Department (SED) leaders were receptive and legislative support was quickly obtained. A bill passed in 1984 provided the money to inaugurate the study in cooperation with Cornell University, which provided office space, staff assistance and auxiliary financial support.

As the plans developed in the summer of 1984, we agreed to undertake as one aspect of the study a "personalized history of reorganization." Basic tools would include a survey of all present and former district superintendents, since they had been privy from the start to the action in the field; contacts with former State Education Department personnel; and

reports from other leading figures and past participants to add substance to the study.

In the beginning no one dreamed we could locate almost 80 retired District Superintendents, including one 100-year-old original 1912 model, Guyon J. Carter. A second, Oliver Winch, passed away at 107 just before we could talk to him. Many are in their high 90's. Despite (or perhaps because of) the travails of reorganization, they were a tough bunch!

The response has been overwhelming. Forms, letters, tape recordings, books, old records, pictures, report cards, newspaper clippings, etc., have flooded the author's home, as well as the Cornell campus. Apparently we have struck a receptive chord, especially with retired people, almost 90% of whom have responded in some fashion, most at length and depth.

Why should we have such cooperation? It appears there are two primary feelings of those responding: (1) What they did was <u>important</u> for boys and girls, and (2) much <u>more</u> needs to be done for rural schools.

There is almost no disagreement about the importance of the efforts of so many over the years. There is <u>much</u> disagreement about what the "more" should be.

As old-timer Ray Sant closes his lengthy report to us: "Charlie: Glad you (and we) can still strike one mightly blow for good education...."[2] This says it all: these hundreds of men and women were completely dedicated to the cause of improving the chances for boys and girls!

But of what use can this study possibly be? That remains to be seen, but it certainly can't hurt to look where we have been in this important work. From the voluminous mass of what many think, there will surely flow some useful ideas for carrying on the unending work of improving rural schools for the 21st century.

Notes

1. Judd, Charles H. (& others), Rural School Survey of New York State Administration and Supervision, Ithaca, NY, 1923, p. 30.

2. Report prepared by Ray Sant, March 1985.

II. GENERAL BACKGROUND

The establishment of local school districts of sufficient size and wealth to provide effective educational programs has been a major problem for each of the states. "Few, if any, problems in American education have a greater influence on the educational opportunities of children and youth," the Department of Health, Education and Welfare concluded in 1957.[1]

As public schools have developed throughout the history of the United States, they have continued to reflect the wisdom of our constitution, which left responsibility for education to the states individually. However, the state-local conflict machinery likely had its origins in the fact that each school began as a local institution. To a considerable degree schools continue proudly to wear that "local institution" label, especially in states where "local control" remains a rallying cry, as in New York.

It would be relatively easy to uncover considerable antipathy in any (or every) community toward "those stupid people in Albany"--or Harrisburg, Concord or Topeka--referring to the State Education Department, or by whatever name that agency goes in each state. These feelings run deep with many citizens, despite the fact that no state other than Hawaii operates local schools directly.

Thus we have the interesting situation in our country of the states being legally responsible but local districts having full administrative powers for operating the schools.

Since the state feels ultimate responsibility for the quality of education, and the efficiency of that education largely is determined by local authorities, it seems inevitable that these two groups may frequently view each other as protagonists. This is especially evident when anyone talks about the possible need for school district reorganization.

> It necessarily follows that if school districts truly function as units of local control they must be capable of providing the scope and quality of educational services that the people of the state as a whole desire for their children and youth. If because of changing conditions...they are no longer capable of performing their educational functions effectively, then the need arises to change them so that the desired services can be performed.[2]

As the effects of industrial revolution reached their heights in rural areas in the 1920s, it became increasingly evident that one-room schools could not be expected to fulfill changing expectations of state authorities or of educational leaders in our universities. Most pupils from such schools were not going on to high school, and thus were denied all chance for higher education.

The Department of Rural Education of the National Education Association (NEA) concluded in its 1954 yearbook:

> The specifications for a comprehensive program of educational opportunity originate and take their scope from the needs of the pupils and community served. That a given school does not have the resources to provide a comprehensive program does not alter the need. Ways must be found to meet deficiencies.[3]

Elwood P. Cubberly pointed up the origin of the problem:

> Wherever half a dozen families lived near enough to make organization possible, they were permitted, by the early laws, to meet together and vote to form a school district and organize and maintain a school. Districts could be formed anywhere, of any size and shape...The simplicity and democracy of the plan had a strong appeal.[4]

Another early authority, Fred Engelhardt, adds dimension to the problem:

> By the time that the states were ready to establish general policies for the administration of schools, many local traditions had grown to maturity and the boundaries of school districts had been practically determined.[5]

Some states organized a system for providing a high school to serve a specified number of one-teacher elementary districts. Others permitted rural districts to send their secondary pupils to town for high school. Neither way worked very well, partly because many students did not go on, and also because rural citizens had little voice in the operation of the high school districts.

To meet these problems, some states "solved" the matter neatly by passing laws similar to West Virginia's, which abolished some 400 districts in 1933 and replaced them with the county unit.

Others, like New York, chose the permissive route, encouraging reorganization by various financial rewards. Some of these, like Pennsylvania, grew weary of the years it took some to take the "needed" step, and finally set a deadline for permissive action, after which the State would make the decision about who would consolidate.

Some claimed to be permissive only, like New Jersey, but on occasion used the "big stick." Even New York had a brief period in the early 1920s when it showed a bit of schizophrenia, when several district superintendents forced one-room school houses to consolidate with high school districts. Another brief period about 40 years later saw the State try penalties for failure to reorganize, rather than rewards, but this was ineffective and never really enforced with enthusiasm.

Notes

1. Fitzwater, C.O., School District Reorganization, Policies and Procedures, U.S. Dept. of Health, Education and Welfard, 1957, p. 3.

2. Ibid., p. 4.

3. The Community School and the Intermediate Unit, 1954 Yearbook, Department of Rural Education, National Education Association, p. 22.

4. Cubberly, Elwood P., Public School Administration, Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1929, p. 5.

5. Engelhardt, Fred, Public School Organization and Administration, Boston: Ginn & Co., 1931, p. 565.

III. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON REORGANIZATION IN NEW YORK

Although there had been some progress in consolidating small groups of one-room schools, there seems little doubt that Commissioner Andrew S. Draper issued the first broadside in the reorganization movement in New York in July, 1912, when he charged the newly appointed 208 district superintendents to "go forth and consolidate" rural districts.

The Thirteenth Annual Report of the State Education Department includes these quotes concerning the intent of 1913 and 1914 legislation:

> ...to give material encouragement to consolidation of rural schools where it is determined...to be educationally desirable. The fact that increased powers are given to district superintendents, the the State guarantees additional financial aid to consolidated schools and that the transportation of pupils is authorized, must be regarded as indicating an intention...of the State to pursue a more active policy in the promotion of rural school consolidation than has heretofore been practiced.[1]

The law passed in 1913 provided for the consolidation of any rural school district which did not provide:

(1) a sufficient number of children so it could be graded properly, and

(2) an adequate amount of taxable wealth to support it without overburdening the taxpayers.[2]

In his 1952 Cornell thesis, Strickler reminds us that:

> Largely as the result of a gradual decrease in the population of the agricultural sections of the State...the number of children attending the schools outside the city had decreased...after 1880 to the point that the Commissioner called attention...to the fact that in 1915, of the 11,642 elementary schools in the State, 8,430 were one-room schools and that the average daily attendance in 3,580 of those was ten or under.[3]

Farmers Week at Cornell in 1920 was the next important influence in the reorganization movement, although the previous creation of the first Central District at Youngsville in 1915 deserves mention. Very likely it can be said that Farmers Week was the single most important event leading to central districts, as we know them today, despite the fact that the legislature never enacted even one of the actions recommended after that famous meeting!

The Committee of 21, which resulted from Farmers Week, set a pattern for future cooperation of rural organizations in accomplishing shared needs. It

included three members each from the Grange, Farm Bureau, Home Bureau, Dairymen's League, State Education Department, Department of Rural Education of State College of Agriculture (Cornell), District Superintendents Association and the Association of Academic Principals. Soon after organizing, the State Teachers Association replaced the combined administrator's group.

The Committee recommended that a community unit be established which can be described thus: the school district was to include the area within which people work together on their social and economic problems. It was, said George A. Works, its chairman:

> a recommendation for the reorganization of school districts on the basis of the natural sociological community.[4]

If that had been seen as the major aim without involving taxation, it may well have passed, but the fact was taxable wealth would be spread to a broader base. A farm might help support a town school, and a business in town might help pay for rural education. That was too much for many people to accept!

George Works and Julian Butterworth were given two year leaves by Cornell and made hundreds of speeches supporting the recommendations all over the State. They had an articulate ally in Ed Eastman, the editor of the Ithaca-based American Agriculturist magazine. The Rural New Yorker, another farm magazine, based its editorial policy on "violent opposition;" the Rural School Improvement Society established a newspaper, The Little Red Schoolhouse, and battled hard to defeat those who would take away their rallying motto, "What was good enough for me is good enough for my children."[5]

Herbert W. Collingwood was the founder of this opposition, but he died in 1927 and was succeeded by D. Boyd Devendorf, a man of immense energy and ability.

An important 1952 study made jointly by the Central School Boards Association and the Institute of Adult Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, concluded:

> Looking back...on the bitterly spirited campaign Devendorf and his followers waged against the State's alleged 'ruthless campaign to close country schools,' an observer is tempted to suggest that the New York State Rural School Improvement Society, Inc., may actually have been more of a help than a hindrance to the achievement of centralization.[6]

Dr. Frank W. Cyr helps our understanding of the battles of 60 years ago[7] by reminding us now that "the best thing that could have happened to us" was that the State, reacting to the new rural call for better schools, created the Bureau of Rural Education and appointed Ray P. Snyder as its Chief. It

seems most fortunate that a central figure of Dr. Cyr's stature is here today to help us understand the events of long ago.

"The resultant battle," state Essert and Howard[8], between Devendorf and Snyder "caught the public imagination. School matters began to rate 'page one' headlines." Several old-time district superintendents recall large squads of state police who routinely covered school meetings on budgets and centralization to handle traffic and preserve order.

While the Committee of 21's proposals never passed the legislature, Strickler feels:

> The evidence supports the conclusion that the immediate acceptance or rejection of these proposals was of little consequence; rather the work of the Committee had two important and lasting effects upon the legislation of 1925 and upon the establishment of the central rural school districts since that time.[9]

The two effects Strickler explains at length may be summarized:

(1) The principle of equalization-state aid to bring equality of opportunity.

(2) The need for lay-professional cooperation.[10]

Paul Mort at Columbia University wrote the legislation for the equalization principle. Prior to that, all state aid had been money provided to match expenditures, so the wealthy got more than the poor. As a young Columbia graduate student, Mort developed an idea on how to reverse all that, giving more money to needy districts, which set the principle later used to help poor districts nationwide.[11] Mort was such a leader that he personally made studies and prepared legislation for equalization in 36 states!

The lay-cooperation plan used by the Committee of 21 itself eventually came to be described thus:

> The cornerstone of American rural public school policy is still the kitchen chair tilted back on two legs, teetering gently to the gestures and head-shakings, the chesty and deliberate reflections of its occupants. Enthroned above the curricula, the new buildings, the organizational skills and the specialized knowledge of educators, there it teeters as indisputable proof that the schools not only belong to the people, but that the school <u>is</u> the people--socially, morally, and economically, today and tomorrow.[12]

Perhaps it should be noted that the previous work has the sub-title, "The Origins, Evolution and Possibilities of an Experiment of the People of New York State in Creation of a New Form of Rural Government through Public Education!"[13] It's a good thing Senator McCarthy never read that!

The 1925 legislation opened the doors for the central school movement by adopting Mort's principle of equalization and providing extra aid for centralized districts. That same year the Bureau of Rural Education was established in SED. While its name was changed to the Rural Education Division in 1932 and the Division of Rural Administrative Services in 1937, Ray P. Snyder continued to make a huge mark on the schools as the person in charge. "As time passed, Ray became known as the 'Father of Centralization in New York State.'"[14]

By 1931, a total of 137 Central Districts had already been formed.

Cornell University was the early focal point of much of the centralization movement. As numerous old-time district superintendents attest, "The early years of centralization were study and learning years in the field and at Cornell."[15] Many of the district superintendents remember taking classes at Cornell each summer with Julian Butterworth and others. Fifty-four percent of the 107 theses and dissertations done on the central school movement prior to 1952 were completed at Cornell. Most of the rest were at Teachers College, Columbia University, where Frank W. Cyr and Paul R. Mort were the big names.

Dr. Cyr still waxes enthusiastic when he remembers: "Those were really exciting times for us. We identified what needed to be done to improve the schools and we found ways to do it--always <u>with</u> the people."[16]

The role of the State Education Department cannot be overlooked. The Twenty-Sixth Annual Report of 1930 stated:

> Henceforth all the resources of the Education Department will be focused toward making the central school in this State the very best school that can be provided.[17]

Francis Griffin started a long-running radio program on WGY, Schenectady to spread information about the rural schools. SED had very talented personnel who spent most of their time in the field helping the district superintendents. Names most frequently mentioned by the old-timers include: James Harris, Helen Heyl, Burton Belknap, George Hutchinson and Francis Griffin.

Long time District Superintendent H. Eugene Wieand remembers all these people fondly but also says the <u>real</u> power in the Department was:

> ...an Irish girl by the name of Eleanore Clancey. She was the 'sweetheart' of the district superintendents! I recall how stunned I was when I paid my very first visit and she <u>greeted me by name</u> (pronounced correctly) and asked how things were 'down in Delaware County.'[18]

Later powers remembered were Eddie Van Kleeck, Warren Schmidt, Wendell Sears, Maurice Osborne and Francis Griffin, who was by now Assistant Commissioner and "seemed to be everywhere at once pushing centralization" as one old-timer puts it.

More modern chiefs have included Harry Langworthy, Leo A. Soucy, John H. Bishop and the present day Kenneth Rowe. No listing should omit at least Donald O. Benedict, Otto Stewart, Ward Legg and Rich Young, who used to greet you "I'm neither rich nor young," but who had the answers when you needed them.

Things were not always 100% smooth in the Department. Various district superintendents have told the author about the trouble that came to a head in 1941.

At that time Ernest E. Cole had been appointed Commissioner following service as Assemblyman from Steuben County; then Senator, 43rd District; then Deputy Commissioner and Counsel under Frank P. Graves.

Ray Snyder was at the peak of his power and his reputation was such that everyone knew him. Frequently he made "snap" decisions, which sometimes were appealed to less well-known Commissioner Cole, who reversed these decisions now and then.

As one old-time district superintendent puts it:

> A feud developed between these stalwarts and eventually Ray, using 'gutter language,' dared Ernie to leave the Commissioner's office, come to the corridor and do battle.[19]

The district superintendents passed the hat and sent Ray and his wife on a cruise, reputedly the only vacation he ever had. He died a few months later. "No rural educator with Snyder's ardor and verve has emerged in New York since his death."[20]

Perhaps the most unusual feature of the New York State educational scene is the office of District Superintendent. No other state has a dual position as officer of the State Education Department and local official representing the Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES). It is not the purpose of this study to examine the "two-hat" role, but a quick look at the part played over the years by the individuals who filled it should be included.

Legislation in 1910 abolished the office of School Commissioner, each of whom was responsible for a State Assembly election district. To replace it, the District Superintendent of Schools position was created, advertised as a professional leadership role.

A look at the previous occupations of the original appointees, however, reveals them to include twelve farmers, two newspaper editors, two attorneys, two real estate agents, and assorted florists, optometrists, authors, farm bureau managers, insurance agents, etc. They all had passed a written test so were "qualified."[21]

Essert and Howard note the district superintendent:

> ...was destined to be the bellwether for the school centralization program that swept New York after 1925. He served notably and valiantly in this campaign. He would frequently take a beating, in local opinion, for 'bureaucratic stupidities' in Albany--and suffer, in Albany, because of 'bullheadedness' in the home district.[22]

While this reference is exclusively "he" centered, it must be noted that many women have served with distinction in the role. Some of the best known include Dorothy Connelly and Ruth B. Winch from Chautauqua County, Melissa Carroll from St. Lawrence County, Amy Bull Crist from Orange County and Pauline G. Bush from Chemung-Schuyler-Tioga Counties.

Mrs. Bush served from 1932 to 1968 and now says:

> Looking back, I think I was insane to choose rural school administration when I could have enjoyed more free time for my husband and family as a teacher.
>
> But, looking ahead, I decided to accept the exciting challenge of helping the citizens of the area develop better educational opportunities for their children.
>
> I wanted to get acquainted with the large rural area--its common school trustees, collectors, clerks, teachers, parents and voters. Their barns, their fields, their kitchens became a place to discuss their hopes and dreams--a great learning experience for me. An experience which never let me underestimate these wonderful rural people. Their real need was accurate information on educational matters and opportunities to react to it...
>
> Looking back again, I am satisfied that I did everything I was intellectually and physically capable of doing including providing a staffed office mostly out of my own salary because I couldn't function from 'a dining room table.'[23]

Essert and Howard conclude:

> ...the district superintendents of New York assumed, and in large measure successfully, the essential role of advance-man and organizer for centralization.[24]

E.R. Eastman, President and Editor of American Agriculturist, paid this tribute in 1950 in a letter to Irving D. Goodrich, Schuyler County District Superintendent:

> It is a pleasure and a privilege to feel that I can team up with the district superintendents to do what we can to promote the educational interests and opportunities of boys and girls.
>
> I have always felt that the district superintendents were right out on the firing line....I live in a rural district and know how emotional rural people can be, particularly over anything pertaining to their schools. In spite of this we have made steady progress in this state--more, I think, than has been made in any other state--in promoting educational opportunity, and a large part of the credit...goes to the district superintendents.[25]

Donald O. Benedict, long time SED official, recently said:

> It is impossible to give too much credit to the district superintendents for the work they did locally to carry out the State's policies on reorganization. They worked with lots of people, some unwilling, some antagonistic, many often lethargic. By persistence, talking and reasoning, things got done.[26]

The State representatives in the field, the district superintendents, worked closely with SED in Albany to fulfill their leadership roles. As Assistant Commissioner Francis Griffin said in 1946:

> The State has boldly discharged its responsibility to provide legislation that would enable the locality to perform...a dynamic function in education.[27]

This was part of a speech Griffin made at a national conference on centralization and he was referring to the centralization law and the "man in the field," the district superintendent.

A 1937 letter illustrating the State-district superintendent relationship was written by Ray P. Snyder to District Superintendent Stephen L. Underwood, on the occasion of the creation of Central District #2 in Middlesex.

> Although the vote was close (actually 446-442 with 9 spoiled ballots and 3 blanks), we shall hope that the people take the result good naturedly. I have not the slightest doubt that the people have done for themselves more by carrying this proposal than they now realize.[28]

Not all of them did! Two appeals were made to the Commissioner but he upheld the result. About five years later, a Mr. Lincoln, who had been one of those making an appeal, told District Superintendent Underwood:

> If I had only known how much better training would be, I would never have been opposed to it.[29]

Mr. Underwood reports that everyone later was happy about the centralization, so much so that Middlesex Valley Central later recentralized with Gorham Central to form Marcus Whitman Central.

Less than ten years after the Snyder-Devendorf debates ended, a Central School Study research team from Columbia looked up D. Boyd Devendorf to see how the renowned foe of centralization now felt about things. He told them:

> His chief object from the beginning had been to arouse rural people to take a keener and more primary interest in school matters...above all he feared state control in the schools, and loss of the local community's inherent right to school management.
>
> He admitted that his youngest son's interest in electrical engineering had led to his transfer from the local high school to Amsterdam High, where electrical and mechanical shops are included in the school plant.
>
> It is still his conviction that district schools are best for children through the sixth grade. After that, he said, pupils should go to a central school with modern facilities.[30]

The next big development in New York came when the BOCES law was passed in 1948. Few people expected much from it, at first. Actually, it was intended as an interim step to what many really wanted, Intermediate Unit establishment. In fact, one surviving letter reveals how one District Superintendent viewed the new legislation:

> I am still of the same opinion I have always been, the whole thing was set up back in Harold French's office and the Department [of Education] long before any committees were appointed or any work done....The whole plan is an experience type of monument to the wild thinking of a PhD (Frank Cyr) who wants to do something and is not capable of doing it along the usual lines. A damn swell job of selling a damn poor article.'[31]

Thus did "Ed" tell his friend "Ty" how he felt about the business at hand. Then he got on to what was really on his mind, how they would make some new fishing flies for use in the Delaware River that summer (1948).

Experience has long since shown that Ed was off base in his predictions, although there remain some people today who view BOCES as of value about equal to his predictions. The story of how successful BOCES has been certainly needs no retelling here.

However, it is important to consider that the successful development of BOCES has certainly reduced the pressure for further centralization of small districts. By assisting local districts to meet many childrens' special needs, in effect centralization (or recentralization) has been slowed, many people feel.

There is a good chance BOCES would not exist today if it were not for one of the original district superintendents. Winfield Trainor was a farm boy, just six months out of Union College when he took the test and was appointed District Superintendent in Lewis County in 1912.

He is remembered by many as someone who worked 20 hours a day for centralization, milking cows with one farmer, attending a cattle auction later in the morning where he talked schools between bids, shoveling manure in the afternoon while he solicited signatures on petitions, etc. He promised the farmers that the new schools would be for all the people--and delivered on his promises.

When the Intermediate District law was being considered 36 years later, Trainor was still a big influence as District Superintendent, now also at the State level. He told the legislative leaders, "I'll defeat it if you don't put in a shared services provision so rural kids can get the instructional services they need." Thus was assured the opportunity now used so commonly thoughout the State.[32]

The success of BOCES led, in the view of many district superintendents, to a change in the State Education Department's attitude toward centralizations. One long-time district superintendent, recently retired, puts it this way:

> ...up to about 1970 I was a disciple of the Master Plan for School District Re-organization--worked at it, believed in it--got the backing of SED!...when Joe Nyquist and the Regents made statements in the early '70s--that school reorganization was no longer a high priority...the whole effort seemed similar to the Vietnam War--"why are we here?" The studies, the board meetings, discussions seemed to become superficial means of fulfilling SED red tape requirements to get programs or building facilities for the individual district.[33]

The success of BOCES followed a struggle about which direction the State should go. Julian Butterworth at Cornell and Francis Griffin in SED led the support for the intermediate unit approach, which would have led to much larger groupings of cooperating, or reorganized, districts. Frank W. Cyr from Columbia, often called the Father of BOCES, and the very important Central School Study Council, placed their support behind BOCES, which meant that small districts could contract for many services without losing their identity. Soon Dr. Griffin changed his mind and became a BOCES advocate, also.

In 1950, a quarterly Central School Study Council magazine, Central Ideas, came into being as a way to share good practices found in rural schools. In the beginning it was just seen as a way to share ideas among teachers. However, Columbia quickly realized it also was an excellent public relations device, so began distribution widely to homes and businesses, as well.

Eventually it was distributed nationwide and became the model for many similar publications.[34]

The New York State Central School Boards Committee for Educational Research also became a very active force for the improvement of central schools about the same time. Frank W. Cyr took a leave from Columbia University in 1948-49 to become the first director of the Committee, which financed many studies of rural schools and promising practices. Throughout the '50s this group played an increasingly prominent role in State educational affairs.

In 1968 Francis E. Griffin was invited to be a major speaker at the annual American Association of School Administrators Convention in Atlantic City. His topic was, "Does School District Reorganization Really Make a Difference?"

He painstakingly outlined the specific advantages his research had revealed--number of electives, depth of program, class enrollments, level of teacher preparation, improved transportation, increased adult education, elimination of inadequate facilities, provision of special services, library facilities, supervision, etc.

The author was there that day and his notes show Dr. Griffin's punch line was, "No one can defend the continuance of any unit of government too small to perform the service for which it was created."[35]

Essert and Howard's book concludes with a chapter called "Guardians of the American Dream," which ends:

> The end goal, today as in the 1830s, is the elevation of human dignity and the achievement of world peace and understanding. Then, as now, it must begin in the public school and spread out from Main Street across the hills, valleys and oceans to encompass all mankind.
>
> This is the American Dream. The central-school district is, and must be, its guardian.[36]

Notes

1. New York State Education Department, Thirteenth Annual Report. Albany, NY: State Education Department, 1917, p. 289.

2. New York State Education Department, Tenth Annual Report. Albany, NY: State Education Department, 1914, p. 97.

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4. Works, George A., The Community Unit-Rural School Survey of New York State Administration and Supervision. Ithaca, NY: Joint Committee on Rural Schools, 1923, pp.543-584.

5. Sant, Raymond. Report prepared for the author, 1985, and various other sources.

6. Essert, Paul L. and Howard, Robert W. Educational Planning by Neighborhoods in Centralized Districts. Teachers College: New York, 1952, p. 37.

7. Conversation with Frank W. Cyr, November 30, 1985.

8. Op. cit, Essert and Howard, pp. 37-38.

9. Op. cit, Strickler, p. 190.

10. Ibid., pp. 190-191.

11. Conversation with Frank W. Cyr, November 30, 1985, and January 18, 1986.

12. Op. cit, Essert and Howard, p. 85.

13. Ibid., title page.

14. Letter from Irving D. Goodrich, March 29, 1985.

15. Sant, Raymond, report, March 1985.

16. Conversation with Frank W. Cyr, August 3, 1985.

17. New York State Education Department, Twenty-Sixth Annual Report. Albany, NY: State Education Department, 1930, p. 107.

18. Correspondence with H. Eugene Wieand, March 13, 1985.

19. Letter from "a friend," August 10, 1985.

20. Op. cit, Essert and Howard, p. 38.

21. Op. cit, Judd, pp. 274.

22. Op. cit, Essert and Howard, p. 31.

23. Letter from Pauline G. Bush, January 14, 1985.

24. Op. cit, Essert and Howard, p. 51.

25. Letter from E.R. Eastman to Irving D. Goodrich, February 2, 1950.

26. Tape recording made for the author by Donald O. Benedict, 1985.

27. Op. cit, Strickler, p. 187.

28. Letter from Ray P, Snyder to Stephen L. Underwood, September 24, 1937.

29. Letter to the author from Stephen L. Underwood, February 1985.

30. Op. cit, Essert and Howard, pp.96-97.

31. Letter from "Ed" to "Ty", January 22, 1948 (author's files).

32. Conversation with Frank W. Cyr, November 30, 1985.

33. Letter from Irvin Henry, June 1985.

34. Op. cit, Essert and Howard, pp. 118-120 and various conversations with interested people.

35. Notes from an AASA speech given by Francis E. Griffin, February 20, 1968.

36. Op. cit, Essert and Howard, p. 130.

IV. HOW WELL HAS REORGANIZATION WORKED?

William (Bill) Fritz from Clinton-Essex-Warren-Washington Counties is now the senior district superintendent in years of service. He provides an interesting commentary on "success" in consolidation:

> ...giving the impression that leadership will cause consolidation is misleading. In my approximate 15 attempts...my leadership was about the same in all cases. I believe the leadership must come from credible people within the community, someone people trust. The people do not necessarily trust the District Superintendent's Office or the State Education Department.[1]

In another letter Bill notes:

> In the Hague-Ticonderoga annexation, it was voted six times before it passed. The leadership was the same all six times, as was mine. I will give you an example of my leadership. The sixth vote, a woman who was on the board came over to me. I know she wanted to hit me with her purse but she said, 'Mr. Fritz, you are a son-of-a-bitch.' I know I maintained my leadership because I still had her respect; she called me Mr. Fritz before she called me a son-of-a-bitch. Twice I was escorted by the State Police 20 miles to the Northway and was very glad they were there.[2]

Some strange reasons for opposition or support can be found in the considerable literature relating to centralization, as it was always called in the '30s and '40s. Stromberg[3], in a doctoral dissertation at Cornell in 1937, quotes at length the reasons given by Portlandville residents for opposing merger with nearby Milford. Five years after the successful action, several were still upset that Portlandville had lost four profitable "boarders," teachers who now lived in Milford and rode the bus six miles to their teaching stations in the Portlandville elementary school, an ancient (no one knows its birth year) wooden structure which this author is pleased to have had a hand in closing in 1984.

Stromberg, however, found an Otego farmer who was pleased by the merger in his area. Five years later he reported when students go to high school now "country kids are no longer hooted."[4]

Commissioner Frank P.Graves always urged patience. In his inaugural address in 1921, he said:

> If the rural people are so blind to their own interests [reorganization], they must be dealt with patiently. They must be conciliated and wooed into a realization of the situation. If they are persuaded rather than driven,

> and informed rather than forced, they will inevitably come to ask for centralization and efficiency.[5]

Cubberly wrote in 1922:

> One of the best evidences to the hold these old-time district schools had on a community is the bitterness with which members of the older generation everywhere have opposed all attempts at a change in the condition... regardless of the fact that practically all of the life conditions surrounding the rural school have since materially changed, these members of the older generation are hardest to convince that there is any need of a change in the school.[6]

Mildred Hull Craib is another retired district superintendent whose memory of an early centralization action holds much interest for us today. She recalls one district meeting where there was no electricity in the school so a near neighbor brought an oil lamp.

Those who favored centralization sat on one side and those opposed grouped themselves on the other. They all listened quietly while she explained centralization procedures but then all courtesy ended. Two opposed men began a fist fight, so the neighbor took the lamp and went home.

The two adversaries "carried the fight outdoors and <u>really</u> fought. The police were called and they finally quit without going to jail."[7]

Victor H. Blom, retired district superintendent from Attica, feels the greatest factor is the leadership of the chief school administrator. He states, "Fear and insecurity relative to the possibility of losing positions may be the chief deterrent...I saw strong administrative leadership ease it in the Pioneer reorganization."[8] He feels assuring administrators and teachers of a job in the newly reorganized district would help.

One interesting letter states, in explaining a defeat:

> There was weak leadership on the part of the District Superintendent, who had been principal of a central school but didn't know how to mold public opinion or pick out the local leaders in the power structure. He should have realized the [proposed] district was not politically better and that when there are few followers, there is no leader.[9]

Ray Sant was thus criticizing himself.

One of the original 1912 District Superintendents was M. Delos Goodrich of Tioga Center. He was somewhat chagrined by an early attempt to carry out the leadership charge given to the 208 new appointees by Commissioner Andrew S. Draper.

Mr. Goodrich notes:

> There was no equipment on the playgrounds and it was sorely needed. To remedy this I wrote what seemed to me to be a very persuasive letter to all trustees. It suggested that good and serviceable rope swings be placed on the school grounds. The letter didn't take. Only one trustee complied--one from whom I had expected no response. When I congratulated him, he said, 'Yeah, and if <u>that</u> doesn't keep the kids out of my orchard, I'll build a six-foot barbed wire fence.'[10]

Steps toward improved schools were sometimes very small and made for "non-educational" reasons!

Leadership skills seem to run in some families. Quite a few names of district superintendents today are the same as those of original or slightly later times--Roosa, Sackett, etc.,---but nothing now, or probably ever, will equal the record of the Goodrich family. M. Delos Goodrich served from 1912-49, his son Hiram from 1929-70, and another son Irving from 1936-75. Both sons are still active and have contributed a great deal from their memories and files for this report.

Some of the present residue of ill will toward district superintendents comes from the old days of "forced consolidation," many writers note. Attorney A. Marcus Connelly of Jamestown, son of District Superintendent Dorothy Connelly, remembers the ugly times when several districts were forced to consolidate with Chautauqua High School, about 1920, shortly before his mother assumed office. North Harmony voted "no" on consolidation but the District Superintendent put them in anyway.[11]

While forced consolidation hasn't been done in New York State for over 60 years, such "horror stories" about the possibility continue to be repeated.

Marcus Connelly was attorney for Central School District #1, Towns of Busti, Ellicott and Harmony in Chautauqua County when it was formed (now known as Southwestern Central). He recalls vividly the way centralization was described to the voters:

> Most of the sparring was over such matters as: (1) Will our little school house be closed, without a by-your-leave from the district inhabitants? (No, Virginia, it will take a separate vote of the natives.)
>
> (2) Will the big high school district hog all the board seats? (No, Virginia, there will be gentleman's agreements--of moral, not legal, validity.)
>
> (3) Will it cost us taxpayers more? (No, Virginia, your big financial sister in Albany is going to pick up the tab for you rural peons.)[12]

Connelly notes, in a reflective mood, "The power of the public money from Albany was the catalytic agent in effecting centralization.[13]

One long-time District Superintendent, who probably would prefer to remain nameless, touches on a similar theme but from a different angle:

> I am afraid those [incentive dollars] are the source of great suspicion. Such consolidation efforts can be likened to foreplay with a prostitute--no real action will take place until she sees your money.[14]

Conrad Ruppert is a retired district superintendent who has had some years to think about what element it was that often made it hard to overcome opposition. He now summarizes it:

> I began to call it SOCIAL. The more I think about it, the more I believe I was on the right track. I refer to the past and current feelings in the district by many regarding their fellow man, which led to whipped up hostilities which could not be overcome. These stated dislikes included:
>
> * farmers vs. villagers (who would run things?)
>
> * many voters vs. cap & gown (in the case of Earlville-Hamilton, the idea that Colgate would run things)
>
> * rural village vs. city (Oneida City Board telling Stockbridge Valley it would be good for them to join)
>
> * discipline (one school feared the other had problems)
>
> * drug problem (someone heard the other had such)
>
> * diverse opinions (during milk riots of the 1930s, some farmers were for the Dairymen's League and others against it)
>
> * etc., etc., or a combination of the above; for sure--"it's an SED idea!"[15]

Sometimes opposition was just difference of opinion but Fran Miller, retired district superintendent from Steuben County, recalls a time when more concrete obstacles had to be overcome. A meeting was called for the voters from a common district bounded by three larger districts, Jasper and Addison Centrals, and Woodhull Union Free, with the proposition they could vote to be annexed by either central district.

It was scheduled for a Saturday in August at 10 am, early enough so the farm people would not be delayed with their haying (the dew did not dry until noon) and those going to "the lake" could still have a good day of boating or fishing.

Since no building in the district could seat all 47 legal voters, the front yard of the clerk's home on Route 17 was selected, with his garage designated in case of rain.

It proved to be a beautiful day but since Route 17 was being rebuilt, a three-foot ridge of gravel prevented anyone from getting in the driveway! It seemed to the District Superintendent that someone had arranged for every usable piece of heavy equipment to be operating on that stretch of road that morning (maybe people from Woodhull Union Free who wanted the students also). It was so dusty and noisy that everyone moved to the back yard, violating the legal notice.

When they reassembled out back, everyone favoring Jasper gathered on one side and those for Addison on the other. After the meeting was called to order, not a word was spoken--not one question was raised.

> Their minds were made up. Forty-five ballots were cast, 23 for Jasper and 21 for Addison and one blank. Thus ended the common contract districts in Steuben County.[16]

Guyon J. Carter is the last survivor of the original 208 district superintendents appointed in 1912. He was 100 years old on December 11, 1985. He headed Districts #4, 5 & 6 in Steuben County and retired at age 71 in 1956. He now says, "I did what I could to see that every school would be strong and the taxpayers voted for them all."[17] He believes careful planning <u>with</u> the people avoided the big problems.

Walter M. Ormsby recalls that his efforts were not always so successful:

> I believe that I probably used too much pressure and tried too hard to get reorganization going. As a result the people resented my pressure and would not go along with the SED recommendations.[18]

Henry Crumb served two different terms as District Superintendent in Onondaga-Madison, retiring finally in 1972. He recalls:

> I stressed 'the soft-sell' approach, pointing out the good and the bad; we were at all times completely honest with the voters. Remember we were working in the days of fantastic suburban growth and...when state building aid was available only to central districts. <u>That fact</u> did the trick more than anything else, including the district superintendent who worked his tail off![19]

Franklin Clark from Greene County served for 28 years, long enough to

become well-known as the philosopher and mountain climber among the district superintendents. He reminds us:

> I feel pretty good about my efforts, but agree with Tolstoy in War and Peace that battles are won or lost because some obscure private shouts: "We're lost, run for your lives!" Or some equally unknown private shouts "Hurrah" (It seems Russians of that period fought better when they shouted "Hurrah.") Also, there is timing with ideas which helps or hinders.[20]

Leonard Baker was District Superintendent in St. Lawrence County from 1936 to 1971. He recalls what a boon it was for the city of Ogdensburg and the entire area when they were finally able to get enough signatures to call for a centralization vote and it passed. Len recently explained how the entire area benefitted from this action:

> Ogdensburg is the only incorporated city in the County of St. Lawrence. It is very small in area facing north on the St. Lawrence Waterway, has a low tax base including a lot of exempt property and the State Mental Hospital.
>
> It was surrounded on three sides by nine common school districts, some of them wealthy, and contracting with the City on a tuition basis for the education of their kids. They had minimum tax rates and very smug about it.
>
> In the 1960s the city faced a building program for a junior-senior high school and an elementary school with a devastating tax rate if the bond issue was voted. I talked with the City Superintendent and he indicated that his board was considering telling those districts they could think about sending their kids elsewhere or share the burden by annexing. The local newspaper began working on them too.
>
> I called on the District Trustees and some other residents to discuss their dilemma. They agreed that the city schools were where they wanted their kids to go. It was where most of them had also gone. The referendum settled the question and a new enlarged city school district was born.
>
> I called on Francis Griffin and his gang from SED to help us figure out the state aid picture and so the 95%-5% bond issue aid was approved for the entire building program including renovations.
>
> Wesley Stitt, the present City Superintendent, can verify all this. It seemed too good to be true. They call it the 95-5 District.

> During that period my BOCES board was planning its two centers, one near Gouverneur and the other in the city area which would serve five centrals and the city.
>
> The city had a technical school which was old and equipment outmoded but they were proud of it, a gift by someone in the old days. The centrals wanted the school outside (a bit of the city vs. rural stuff). But the city government promised to finance a new street opening on to the main highway to provide access for the buses to a very good site in the city area. A referendum finally settled the question and a new BOCES Center opened in late 1970 on the City site.
>
> I have watched the evolving of the BOCES program over the years since I retired and am glad to have been a part of the planning over 15 years ago.
>
> The Ogdensburg City School System is now rated as one of the best for its size and has been cited by outside agencies for its program, staff, etc.[21]

Clarence Armstrong, another old-time district superintendent in St. Lawrence County says:

> I think my efforts were well worth all the time and energy put into them. Now the rural boys and girls have opportunities their fathers and mothers never had (for a decent education and a chance for college)...[22]

He has an interesting idea also:

> One of the arguments advanced against centralization was that boys and girls could wear dungarees in the one-room school but would have to dress up in the central school. Maybe they were the ones who started the dungaree fad as it exists today.[23]

Jack Loveless served for 30 years as Wayne-Finger Lakes District Superintendent, although the name changed many times. He believes all his efforts in centralizing schools were necessary and have proved beneficial.

He also recalls some interesting changes in his relationship with several women:

> In Phelps-Clifton Springs a friend of mine [a woman] led the opposition and was pretty bitter toward me. When she passed away, I was asked to [and did] serve as a bearer. In the Geneva consolidation [District], a woman bitterly opposed it and me. After it happened, she was elected to

> the Board and for years used to call me frequently for help in her Board duties.[24]

William Farnsworth still feels bad about failing to convince Angelica, Belfast, Belmont and Friendship to combine their central districts. Since the vote failed, he notes:

> The real losers have been the students. The curriculum available to them does not adequately prepare them for advanced training beyond high school. Many good high school graduates are experiencing difficulties with college courses.[25]

District Superintendent Gordon Wheaton faced some difficult times in Suffolk County, including legal actions. One involved an NAACP suit against him to force the desegregation of the almost 100% black Wyandanch Union Free District by dividing it among its neighbors.

After months of wrangling, the Commissioner ruled that the District Superintendent did not have the legal power to dissolve a district (nor did the Commissioner), despite an ancient law which said this was possible.

Dr. Wheaton remains bothered by all this, despite his many successful efforts to obtain special grants for innovative programs for this district.

> Affluent neighboring districts not only wanted no part of Wyandanch on <u>any</u> basis, but also [we] were repeatedly threatened with bodily harm to the District Superintendent and his family...[26]

Today he feels, "I was of the opinion then, as I am now, that Wyandanch should be reorganized...I wish very much that I could have done more."[27]

Richard J. (Dix) McDonald still feels a sense of frustration that none of his efforts could even be brought to a vote, but the times were changing by the time he became District Superintendent in Steuben-Allegany. He says now:

> If the people cannot be convinced that they must surrender their identity with and committment to a school, no amount of facts (money saving, better curriculum, better efficiency, etc.) will effect a change.[28]

Homer Dearlove served as District Superintendent for 16 years in Washington-Warren-Hamilton-Essex counties. He pretty much agrees with Dix:

> The loss of identity became the real issue. The loss of athletic competition, etc., also was an important objection.[29]

Clifford Crooks retired in September, 1985 as District Superintendent in Erie County. As he was making his last trip to Albany by Amtrak, he wrote a

long letter to the author explaining his feelings about reorganization. He noted:

> I would like to see some merger [work] continue, where it is geographically feasible and programmatically sound. But I think some mergers are not going to offer viable alternatives to the problems found by small districts in rural areas. We should look for other alternatives, such as the retention of community elementary schools served on the secondary levels by regional high schools or BOCES.
>
> I would also hope that more attention may be given to insistence on maintenance of academic standards and effective programs in working out consolidations or other organizational patters than we have in the past. Too frequently we spent more time on economics than on the education of the children.[30]

Notes

1. Letter from William Fritz, January 30, 1985.

2. Letter from William Fritz, February 20, 1985.

3. Stromberg, Eugene T., The Influence of the Central Rural School on Communty Organizations, PhD Thesis, Cornell, 1937.

4. Ibid., p. 107.

5. School and Society, Frank P. Graves, "A State and its Education," October 29, 1921, p. 354.

6. Cubberly, Elwood P., Rural Live and Education, Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1922, p. 89.

7. Letter from Mildred Hull Craib, January 1985.

8. Letter from Victor H. Blom, February 25, 1985.

9. Letter from Raymond Sant, February 1985.

10. Goodrich, M. Delos, 1912-1962, Fifty Years in the Schools of Tioga County, duplicated paper.

11. Letters from A. Marcus Connelly, March 4, 1985 and January 8, 1986.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Letter from "a friend" I would like to keep, January 30, 1985.

15. Conrad H. Ruppert, survey form, February 1985.

16. An article "The Last Hurrah" prepared by Francis Miller for the author, 1985.

17. Letter dictated by Guyon J. Carter, January 1985.

18. Survey form, Walter M. Ormsby, February 1985.

19. Survey form, Henry Crumb, February 1985.

20. Survey form, Franklin Clark, March 1985 and letter January 5, 1986.

21. Survey form, Leonard Baker, January 1985 and letter January 7, 1986.

22. Survey form, Clarence Armstrong, January 1985.

23. Ibid.

24. Survey form, Jack Loveless, February 1985.

25. Survey form, William Farnsworth, January 1985.

26. Survey form, Gordon Wheaton, January 1985 and letter January 6, 1986.

27. Ibid.

28. Survey form, Richard J. McDonald, January 1985.

29. Survey form, Homer Dearlove, January 1985.

30. Letter from Clifford N. Crooks, May 1985.

V. SOME SUCCESS STORIES

Success stories in reorganization are numerous around the State. In a 1952 Cornell thesis on the development of central schools, Robert W. Strickler concluded:

> The reorganization of the system of common schools in rural New York State is recognized as one of the major educational developments of the first half of the twentieth century. The central rural school district has largely replaced, within the past 27 years, the common school district and has provided a unit of administration and taxation more adapted to the educational and social needs of rural society. By 1951-52, 425 central districts were in operation, representing a total of 6.760 former districts and extending over approximately 85% of the rural area of the State.[1]

Of course it cannot be concluded that all of the central districts formed worked smoothly. Most early voters were of the "single population center," like Gouverneur, where 49 common school districts voted in 1950 to join with the Gouverneur District, despite the opposition of the village superintendent and many faculty members. District Superintendent Leonard Baker, the press and many citizens' groups joined to make this a success story which continues today.[2]

A much earlier one is remembered with much pride by former District Superintendent Hiram Goodrich. In 1934, the Whitney Point centralization was approved easily, involving 27 common districts and two union free, Whitney Point and Lisle. Later, eight more common districts were annexed, creating what has been generally recognized as a smoothly cooperative district with a successful history.[3]

Melissa Carrol, retired district superintendent from St. Lawrence County, remembers fondly the Parishville-Hopkinton and Colton-Pierrepont Central Districts as two success stories of the early '40s. Both were approved handily on their first presentation to the voters and have earned reputations as fine rural districts over the years.

Those two were easy compared with her challenge in the Norwood-Norfold Central District. This merger involved fifteen common districts, one four-teacher elementary, and two union free districts. Each union free had the same number of pupils, each community was very proud of its school, each district preferred its own centralization. The two had been keen rivals in sports for years and each supervising principal had exactly the same number of years of experience. Also, each was under a different district superintendent!

Many meetings involved all the leaders of both districts. All major problems were anticipated prior to the vote, agreements reached on assignments of personnel, and a plan formulated for the location of the new

junior-senior high school exactly halfway between the villages. The result of this 1948 centralization has been rewarding to everyone, especially the students.[4]

One of the most interesting recentralizations is remembered by former District Superintendent John W. Harrold in describing the 1967 formation of the Au Sable Valley Central School District.

Involved were voters of 38 former districts now merged in two central districts, with towns in Clinton, Essex and Franklin counties. Because of the excellent prior planning and much involvement, perhaps even a bit of horse trading, the vote carried easily the second time after an earlier defeat. Mr. Harrold reports that perhaps this came about because both district superintendents retired before the vote and the Boards agreed to build a new high school midway between Keeseville and Au Sable.[5]

Retired District Superintendent Philip Peters is happy to remember the formation of the Riverhead Central District on Long Island, a region which has had more than its share of problems in creating reorganizations in line with the Master Plan. In Riverhead, ten elementary districts and one high school district used strong committee organization and good lay leadership to gain a successful vote, resulting in a fine educational system. Prior to the vote, Phil labeled it an "inefficient hodge-podge."[6]

Wright Johnson likes to tell about the success of the Mount Markham Central District, formed from the former villages of Bridgewater, Leonardsville, and West Winfield along Route 20. He notes the great work of a broad-based advisory committee coupled with strong support of the professional staff in each of the three districts, all of whom believed that an improved comprehensive curriculum would benefit the students. He now notes, "Good leadership on the part of chief school administrators and Board members also contributed to the success of this reorganization."[7] No doubt the able leadership of "Lefty" Wright had something to do with it, also!

Old time District Superintendent Stephen Underwood remembers every detail of the formation of the highly regarded Penn Yan Central District. After years of discussion and dozens of trips to Albany by many people, the voters finally approved the district in 1952, bringing together 50 districts and completing the centralization of every district in Yates County.[8]

District Superintendent Ken Ford reports with much satisfaction the formation of the South Lewis Central District, which combined South Lewis with Port Leyden. He notes:

> Most important was the strong support of the District Principal and the full Boards...the citizens committee made up of teachers, people for and against the merger, plus business people who were strongly in favor played a very effective role in making the vote successful.[9]

In his book, Rural Education in Steuben County[10], George R. Daulton recounts at considerable length all the years of hard work by hundreds of

people which ultimately led to the creation of the Corning-Painted Post Area School District, formed from 61 school districts of every known type, the second (and largest) of the 33 enlarged city school districts in the state. (Lockport was first the year before.)

After many trips to Albany, the conclusion was made that the laws would not fit this unusual situation. After some changes and many new "interpretations," a Harvard University research team prepared a 1952 report, A Valley and a Decision, which received national publicity, because it called for spending $12,470,000 for new construction (an almost unheard of amount at that time), plus the creation of a community college to be operated by the school district, a first in the State.

On June 22, 1954, 3,843 voters from the 60 districts (Corning city voters were ineligible due to the law) cast their ballots. Because the margin of victory was only 45 votes, several taxpayer suits could be expected and such did result, but Commissioner Lewis A. Wilson moved swiftly to permit the 275 square mile district to begin operations that fall.

Despite the many huge logistic and personnel problems which had to be promply overcome, this district has certainly shown that at least one large rural area can be successfully merged with a city district. The district's fine reputation and its outstanding community college are known nation-wide. People in the area seem to take special pride in what they have accomplished together for their young people.

Clayton H. Brown is another old-time district superintendent who recalls the success of numerous centralizations in his book, "Saratoga" Education[11]. One reported is Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake Central, formed in 1925 by unanimous vote. District Superintendent Ms. Lou Messinger was apparently a convincing leader!

Another success story in his book reports the 1949 creation of Galway Central, which involved three district superintendents (Rodney O. Winans, Clayton H. Brown, and F. Donald Myers), 21 districts in eight towns and four counties. Yet it passed 482-172 and has operated well ever since.

Don Myers is most proud of South Glens Falls Central, which was approved in 1945 by a margin of more than 6-1. Don says the reasons for success were: sound financial plan; excellent Boards, administration and staff; everyone since has worked to carry out every promise made in 1945.[12]

Elwood A. Forrester[13] reports on an anonymous district in Jefferson County, created from four union free (K-12) districts and 39 common districts.

He feels much of the success of this district results from the gentleman's agreement made many years ago that one board member would come from each of the former union free and one member from each of the five major towns represented. This agreement has never been violated and, as promised, an elementary school has been continued in each former union free district.

Walter Ormsby feels Sachem Central should be one of which all should be proud. This was formed from several Long Island districts, including Brookhaven, Islip and Smithtown. He notes:

> This started with complete support of the three Boards and now has complete support of the three communities and the people. A strong school district has developed and had responsible people as Board members and capable administrators.[14]

One centralization with a different twist is Three Village, composed of the previous districts of Setauket and Stony Brook. Former District Superintendent William F. Phelan tells how many years it took to get the State Education Department to permit them to join. Associate Commissioner Walter Crewson was adamantly opposed because the original Master Plan called for a larger grouping, which also was to include Port Jefferson, Port Jefferson Station (Comsewogue), Mount Sinai, Miller Place, Rocky Point, Shoreham and Wading River.

> Dr. Crewson, while seemingly recognizing that unheralded population growth was causing this nine district plan to be too all-inclusive, strongly opposed the centralization of Stony Brook and Setauket with no positive attention being given to the joining of Port Jefferson Station with any other district. In addition, Dr. Crewson felt very strongly that the Port Jefferson District, due to its vast wealth by virtue of its LILCO plant, should join with other districts such as Port Jefferson Station and Mount Sinai.[15]

After the Cullen Committee recommended the smaller reorganization and the Ammerman Committee also supported it, Commissioner James Allen finally gave his blessing.

Dr. Phelan also notes:

> The success of this central district, now known as the Three Village District, has been almost unheralded. This success perhaps has been largely due to the almost unanimously positive feelings among the citizens and leaders in the two districts toward becoming one district. The actual vote on centralization was so highly positive that everyone seemed ready and waiting to go forward together. The new Board was selected with great numbers of people voting. The new Board was organized quickly and went to work without a moment of delay. The community climate and financial ability of the citizens of the new district did much to assure educational success. The high quality of the respective newly-elected Board members and their dedication to doing a super job was most important.[16]

Reflecting on the present enrollment of nearly 9,000 pupils and its obvious success, the people may just have known more about the future than did the Associate Commissioner in this case!

A much different success story deals with the first (and only) dissolution of a central district. District Superintendent Charles E. Davis culminated a four year search for an answer to the Grand Gorge Central problem when it became too small and uneconomical to operate. The Board, in desperation, had asked him to find a solution. In 1981 the district was finally split, as he recommended, by vote of the people, with parts being attached to Roxbury, Stamford, Windham-Ashland-Jewett and Gilboa-Conesville Central Schools.

The students and the taxpayers all seem pleased with this ultimate solution. An enrollment K-12 of 192 was just too small to accomplish the basic goals of a school system, especially with a weak tax base.[17]

The 1954 NEA Yearbook concludes:

> Experience indicates that when the boundaries of a newly reorganized school district coincide closely to the boundaries of the natural or sociological community--village, town, or city together with the tributary trade and service area of smaller population centers and open country--the district is almost always successful.[18]

The first recentralization proved that things could be done to broaden the central district's base. In 1951, the Dryden- Freeville Central District and the McLean Central District voters approved joining their two already reorganized districts into what has been sometimes called "supercentralization."

Recently Fred Billard, former district principal of the old McLean Central School, organized a meeting for the author which included two former school board members from McLean. Martin Beck must be one of very few who served as the trustee of an old one-room school (Malloryville #22), then was on the McLean Central Board, and finally on the recentralized Dryden-Freeville-McLean Board. Also attending was Merton Webb from McLean, who was an original recentralized board member.

All three men remember well when Ray P. Snyder from SED was in McLean in 1931 to speak at the dedication of the new McLean Central School, which became the pride of the community. All three also feel they did the right think in working to recentralize. Mert Webb says:

> There is no question there are good and bad in such a decision; you take some things you don't want to get what you do. It pulls kids away from your little community but we realized it wouldn't be 100% better. The advantages for kids far outweigh the disadvantages. I'd still do it again if the chance were there to provide better education.[19]

Martin Beck tells some funny stories about his early days as a board member when Albany (and its legal requirements) seemed far away. He chuckles about the time McLean cut some corners when the new school was built.

> We didn't have enough money so we did things to benefit the taxpayers without worrying about Albany. It was depression time and there wasn't much work. A Groton concern that built roads agreed to do all our excavation and grading for a very low price with the understanding we could pay them when we found the money. That way we got what we wanted and they kept their men busy. There wasn't any bidding--and we paid them several years later.[20]

Martin agrees the decision to recentralize was proper. The school was too small and we couldn't give students enough choice of courses. Actually Virgil should have joined the recentralized district, too.[21]

Fred Billard was that unusual man who put his convictions ahead of his own interests. He pushed the recentralization knowing he would lose his job as district principal. He now says, "It was for the best. We were just too small and needed to get into a larger school. It's too bad many other small schools can't see the advantages."[22]

This new district has proven to be a real success story, but in many ways it reflects the wisdom of the 1954 Yearbook's conclusion on "the natural or sociological community."[23]

Some reorganizations, however, seem to prove that multiple center districts can be very successful, as the following two examples illustrate.

Cato-Meridian Central has often been called a model district by SED officials. It was voted in 1940, consisting of two similar village union free districts, only two miles apart, and 28 common districts.

District Superintendent Raymond T. Sant, like many others, traveled to Cornell each summer to study under Professor Julian Butterworth, who taught him that a strong sense of community involvement was essential. Three years were spent preparing for the vote, so that everyone had full chance to be heard and to learn the details of the plan.

Two other districts were subsequently annexed and this created the largest centralization up to that time.

Ray Sant now remembers this district with much personal pride. He attributes the success to "numerous personal contacts, strong SED support, many small district meetings, a low profile and much hard work."[24] He notes that this district has never lost a bond issue or budget vote.

Another fine success story can be found at Pioneer Central, which was formed in 1965 from Arcade Central and Delevan-Machias Central. Originally,

Franklinville Central was included in the planning but backed out before the vote.

Retired District Superintendent Vic Blom remembers well the meticulous planning involving many people. Since the new incentive aid paid 90% of the cost of the new high school and 95% of the cost of the middle school, the district could afford to make the instructional program outstanding for the area.

Vic says:

> The principals of the two districts were ready for the merger. Both filled good leadership roles. Their administrators, supervisors and teachers offered no apparent opposition...I had worked...for mergers for several years without results. This [merger] illustrated what could be done with the leadership of Chief School Administrators.[25]

Notes

1. Strickler, Robert W., The Origins & the Development of the Central Rural School Districts in NY State, 1952 Thesis, Cornell University.

2. Survey form, Leonard Baker, January 1985.

3. Letter from Hiram Goodrich, February 1985.

4. Correspondence with Melissa Carroll, 1985.

5. Harrold, John W., School Districts in Clinton County, NY. (Privately published and undated.)

6. Letter from Philip Peters, February 1, 1985.

7. Letter from F. Wright Johnson, March 5, 1985.

8. Letter from Stephen Underwood, March 3, 1985.

9. Survey form, Kenneth Ford, March 1985.

10. Daulton, George R., Rural Education in Steuben County, 1978.

11. Brown, Clayton H., "Saratoga" Education, 1978.

12. Report from F. Donald Myers, February 1985.

13. Survey form, Elwood A. Forrester, March 1985.

14. Survey form, Walter Ormsby, March 1985.

15. Letter from William H. Phelan, April 1985.

16. Letter from William H. Phelan, January 1986.

17. Author's notes.

18. 1954 Yearbook, op. cit, p. 33.

19. Conversation with author, January 28, 1986.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Conversation with retired superintendent William H. Deming.

24. Letters from Raymond T. Sant, 1985.

25. A report prepared for this study by Victor H. Blom, 1985.

VI. SOME TROUBLE SPOTS

One classic case of a "difficult" proposed recentralization is the Wyoming-Warsaw-Pavilion area.

Newspaper clippings, letters to Albany, old studies--all tell a tale of these districts that have been studied over and over, in groups of two and all three together--to no avail.

Why do studies continue after over 40 years of inaction? The most recent studies were in 1984, when Wyoming was studied in combination with each of the other two. Apparently Boards and administrators continue to be interested, the incentive aid would be most helpful to taxpayers, the secondary school program improved, yet nothing happens.

One former district superintendent says about it, "Old athletic rivalries carry over into the voting." Another notes, "There is too much suspicion about who pays whose debts." Another cites "lack of trust of administrators and Boards."

Whatever it is, little Wyoming continues to play a role like a flirt, but no one ever can seem to consummate the long-term courtship with a marriage because Wyoming is not "ready." Children have been born, educated, graduated and now their children have done the same--all since merger talk first began.

Referring to this same situation, one old-time district superintendent now says, "It truly was a good union from every angle. The only other thing you can say about it is that it is a shame!"[1]

Dannemora Union Free is another example of a district without a centralization. Over the years numerous proposals have been made to combine it with Saranac Central, but nothing has ever happened because the Dannemora Board has not really been interested.

Many Dannemora secondary pupils historically attended Plattsburgh High School of Saranac Central, ostensibly because of limited facilities and restricted curriculum offerings.

"It is only about two miles between the high schools but the two districts have learned to ignore each other,"[2] according to one previous district superintendent.

Perhaps the biggest stumbling block is differences in types of community, coupled with general distrust. Another factor may be that Saranac's enrollment is almost 10 times as large as little Dannemora.

Most retired district superintendents report the feeling that <u>all</u> centralizations (the old term) have worked out well. Many feel it is just the ones that could not get together which continue to have trouble.

This may be an oversimplification, since some much publicized battles have occurred over the new name of the district (such as Unatego, to combine Unadilla and Otego Central Districts), the location of a proposed new building in many districts, alleged promises made during pre-centralization meetings which were not kept, and tax rate estimates naively projected over future years which didn't hold up, since they often overlooked factors which could not be held constant (enrollment, inflation, increased demands on the schools, higher costs of construction and salaries).

Perhaps "worked out better" would be a more defensible statement than "worked out well," or "as compared to what the boys and girls were getting previously."

More frequently, though, it seems to be as one retired district superintendent on Long Island notes anonymously:

> As usual the "haves" do not want to take on the problems of the "have nots." It is more profitable for an affluent high school district to receive tuition from outlying elementary districts than to add them to their tax bases.[3]

Long-time District Superintendent Bill Phelan lists an interesting and surprising answer for a central district which he feels was not made up of the correct grouping of districts. As Dr. Phelan looks back to the centralization of Shoreham and Wading River, he probably would be the first to state that this centralization has been highly successful. He, however, still has deep concerns that the vast wealth of Long Island Lighting Company's (LILCO) new plant, which is located within this district, now serves only one central district. He has similar concerns that Port Jefferson, which is a very small district (in Long Island terms) has a giant LILCO plant and is centralized with no other districts. Dr. Phelan feels that the taxpayers in all of Suffolk County contribute to the wealth of the LILCO plants, be they steam or nuclear, while the school taxes paid by LILCO benefit a very limited number of districts.

Dr. Phelan also is concerned about the present very serious situation being faced by LILCO. There seems to be a powerful move toward public take-over which, of course, would have an enormous effect on the tax base.[4]

These comments raise the question of whether it is in the best interests of the general citizenry to have one district profit tremendously financially from a happenstance of location of a utility, for example. The equalization formula as now practiced cannot be expected completely to overcome this lack of financial balance.

One retired district superintendent asks, "How is it that Bridgewater, Leonardsville and West Winfield can get together as Mount Markham Central but four others along Route 20 can't?"[5] Reference here is made to Brookfield, Madison, Oriskany Falls and Waterville.

Since that question was raised three years ago, Oriskany Falls has been annexed to Waterville but the other small districts remain.

Former District Superintendent for that area Wright Johnson was asked to react to this concern. He responded:

> Strong feelings of localism permeated the thinking of many. Emotional issues in some cases were more dominant than factual information regarding the benefits...a lack of a sense of "common community" was evident in the proposed reorganization.[6]

Roy Dexheimer reports in detail about the mid-'60s effort to merge seven central districts in Delaware, Greene and Schoharie counties. The proposal was that Stamford would be the center for Charlotte Valley, Jefferson, Gilboa-Conesville, Grand Gorge, Roxbury and South Kortright, all very rural Central Districts of under 600 students each.

A wealthy local citizen offered to donate a site and pay up to $1,000,000 toward building the needed secondary school. SED assured the local Boards that this would more than pay the local share of construction.

The donor specified no strings, except that the new high school would be located in Stamford, his hometown, which was the geographic center anyway. Roy's recollections are shared here at some length because they so vividly illustrate what can go wrong with a "good" plan:

> Brochures were created to tell the story to our constituents. My dimming recollection is that at least three districts, their Boards of Education and Superintendents, never took those brochures out of the closet to distribute or discuss in their districts.
>
> South Kortright, bless their farmer hearts, had a Board which was willing to present the issues fairly regardless of any personal reservations held by any individual Board members. We scheduled a dozen and one-half farmhouse living room conversations with our neighbors. Each of those conversations was attended by the Supervising Principal--me--and the Board member from that particular region of the district. I probably have never encountered so many delicious home-baked cookies or so much instant coffee in my life! We also had meetings in each of the three functioning school buildings scattered along the west branch of the Delaware.
>
> I have many memories of those delightful living room discussions, but two comments will remain with me always. One was the firm declaration by a parent that he "didn't want his daughter ridin' a school bus with them fellas from Roxbury!" I felt compelled to point out two things to him: one was the unlikelihood that we would route a

bus to Stamford from Bloomville via Roxbury, and thus there would be very little back seat contact for his daughter to fret over. The second observation was that he probably would have been surprised at his daughter's current behavior on the buses with her own South Kortright boys.

Our greatest adversary was a farmer from the Bloomville area by the name of Flavius Maurer. Flay was a quintuplet as far as I could tell--he showed up at five different living room meetings all over the district to argue his case. His most mind-boggling moment came in our final large-group meeting in the Bloomville School gymnasium. He allowed as how he had finally figured out why we wanted to build that big centralized high school. The reason clearly was so we could gather all those kids together in one spot and thus make it easier for the Russians to bomb 'em! I had to admit that the image of wave after wave of MIG's diverting their attention from Pittsburgh and Cleveland and Washington to Stamford, New York when the final assault was mounted had an irresistible lure to it.

In the end, of course, a combination of inertia plus the usual myths destroyed any chance we had for this desirable reorganization. The South Kortright district, to their everlasting credit and my great pride, voted to have a referendum. With three districts not even bothering to take a vote, we could not even put the issue before our collective constituents. We heard endlessly about the dissipated basketball teams, the long distances we would now have to travel for sports and other activities, the lack of individual attention in this massive new educational complex, and the devastating impact losing all of these high schools would have on each of these hamlets. I stayed in South Kortright for another full year beyond the one in which we had conducted the study, partly to disprove the allegation that I was promoting this reorganization only for self-serving reasons. Then I sadly left, convinced that we had allowed a very special opportunity to pass from us. My observation of those districts currently (one of which does not even exist any more) is that they are struggling with low enrollments and high taxes, and probably have lost even the minimum flexibility they had twenty years ago. What a shame![7]

The author can add later chapters, since many of these same districts were studied over and over for the full range of his thirteen years as District Superintendent.

The "low point" of all those studies occurred during the proposed reorganization of Grand Gorge, Stamford and Jefferson, one of several ill-fated combinations which have proven to be unsaleable. This study had been moving along nicely in 1972-73, with no visible opposition, and apparently full support from all Boards and faculties.

Without warning a small group of recent arrivals from Long Island, running away from crowding, organized with a local real estate dealer who feared he might not sell the remaining parts of his farm to similar people.

The Board in Jefferson stopped dead in its tracks and looked for a handy escape valve. The Supervising Principal, Robert Harvey, and I suggested an informal referendum just in Jefferson. With the entire faculty prepared to support us publicly, we felt encouraged at least.

On the night of the meeting, the small opposition group rounded up every known malcontent from a radius of 75-100 miles and a few from Long Island to attend. Whenever I mentioned incentive aid that night, they would pitch large numbers of carrots at me! This was only one of the indignities heaped on "that overpaid BS'er from Albany" (despite the fact that I lived in Stamford).

I made a solemn promise following the 360-60 defeat never to mention reorganization again in Jefferson--and never have.

Today all those districts are smaller, except Grand Gorge, whose dissolution was earlier described in this report. Will they ever merge? Only God knows, and if He's smart, He will delegate the job to Satan![8]

Retired District Superintendent Franklin Clark quotes Van Wyck Brooks: "Intensity always prevails, whether it be good or whether it be evil." This is in reference to numerous defeats in Greene County during the '50s and '60s. He also encountered organized opposition from outside the district, headed by a woman from Delmar who "had more intensity than we did."[9]

Notes

1. Author's notes, circa 1984.
2. Author's notes, circa 1985.
3. Letter from anonymous retired district superintendent, January 1985.
4. Letters from William Phelan, March 15, 1985 and January 8, 1986.
5. Letter from anonymous retired district superintendent, March 1985.
6. Letter from Wright Johnson, April 1985.
7. Letter from Roy Dexheimer, January 24, 1985.
8. Author's memory--highly suspect!
9. Letter from Franklin Clark, January 20, 1985.

VII. WHAT COMES NEXT?

Historically, when centralization issues in New York are brought to a vote, they almost always pass.[1] This fact probably accounts in part for the violent battles which often occur during the discussion stages. Perhaps opponents are aware that they must make their mark before a vote is actually scheduled.

That being the case, why doesn't the State relax its stand on the presently required preliminary hurdles and just call for mandatory votes in areas where the "experts" feel they should be held?[2]

Such an idea overlooks the basic fact that New York remains what one former high State Education Department official has called "the last bastion of local control"[3] in the country. Many now propose doing away with the "last bastion" for the sake of kids.

Retired District Superintendent Hugh W. Vanderhof puts it simply:

> Until the legislature mandates and the governor signs a bill mandating reorganization as of the day of the governor's signature, reorganization will drag on like a snail on a gravel path.[4]

That is strong medicine, but many others agree.

Another recently retired District Superintendent lays out the same idea in exact detail:

> ...legislation is the only answer. Albany in conjuction with the District Superintendents should decide which schools are too small to operate efficiently. Legislation should be enacted that would greatly reduce aid for the inefficient. Then only those who could afford it would want to, or be able to remain small.
>
> I am not really opposed to small schools <u>if</u> the needs of kids are met. There are many creative ways to meet kids' needs in small schools but unfortunately in the majority of cases it just doesn't happen.[5]

Another retired District Superintendent is Phil Peters, whose frustration with reorganization efforts on Long Island has been previously cited in this study. He says:

> During my time there have been three legislative commissions formed for the purpose of studying and making recommendations on district reorganization. Despite these efforts very little has been accomplished or will be accomplished unless legislated.[6]

Another strong voice for mandates is retired Assistant Commissioner Leo A. Soucy. For many years he served as Chief Department officer for reorganizing schools, among other important jobs. He recommended recently:

Legislation to

a. Eliminate districts that do not operate high schools

b. Eliminate districts that do not graduate 100 or more

c. Provide the 20% incentive (aid) for 10 years...[7]

An old-time District Superintendent balances economy with his somewhat similar call:

> All small districts...should be eliminated if need be by Commissioner's office. They are and have been expensive, inefficient and indefensible in this day.[8]

The Commissioner feels he cannot legally take such a step, as previously mentioned, but retired District Superintendent George Maybury, previously of Albany-Schoharie Counties, was close to the seat of power for many years. He sees a different route to the same goal:

> The State at some point has to stop paying premium aid for marginally organized districts--unless unreasonable distances are involved.[9]

These are only a few of many educational leaders, present and past, who feel State intervention, legislative or executive, must be taken. Most couch their feelings in terms of the needs of kids, whom they feel are cheated by the whims of those who oppose needed change.

Several present distict superintendents, like Charles H. Bohlen of Jefferson-Lewis-Hamilton-Herkimer-Oneida BOCES, suggest a more flexible view toward reorganization than we now have, encouraging any kind of "trial" experience. For example, a district could send its juniors to another school for a year under contract without losing aid or jeopardizing their school registration. Then, if successful, add another grade to the contract for the second year. He also thinks shared superintendents should be encouraged in small districts and that these may lead mutually to reorganization.[10]

Robert W. Sekowski, District Superintendent in Oneida-Herkimer-Madison BOCES, suggests a similar plan, calling it an "engagement period." He proposes also "...giving school districts some (extra) aid to allow certain things to happen before the merger process is final."[11] Either partner could back out after the engagement period if they were not satisfied.

A considerable group of present and past District Superintendents see BOCES as the potential key to the small districts secondary problems.

Retiree John W. Harrold would maintain the high schools in the various communities but have BOCES offer the extras--advanced foreign languages, mathematics and science, special art and music, etc.[12]

Roscoe L. Williams, a retired Dutchess County District Superintendent says: "It is desirable to keep education as close to the home as possible, but I support studies to see how the work of BOCES can be strengthened to fill the gaps."[13]

Ernest H. Hoeldke, an Erie County retiree, supports a similar idea, adding another possible BOCES program "such as the CCC of the '30s."[14]

Suffolk County District Superintendent Edward J. Murphy has recently been working with a committee of executives from business and industry and school superintendents, preparing a "School of Excellence" proposal for a full-time regional technical high school. Ed says, "I feel this direction may be an important one in the future, to meet the needs of the highly talented students...and will serve as a model for future cooperative projects."[15]

Retired District Superintendent Richard D. Sparks had the added dimension of long experience in the State Education Department. He is convinced the ideal enrollment for a good school district is in the 3000-3500 range.

> For the smaller 500-1000 district, BOCES should be allowed and encouraged to <u>operate</u> joining centers for academics on a half-day basis vis a vis vocational education. This is particularly needed in foreign languages and math/science...particularly for the college bound student.[16]

Dick concludes, however, that the idea may never fly because of "provincialism" over "BOCES taking control." Many express similar frustrations that good programs for kids are lost because of adult jealousies.

One who speaks eloquently to that point is previously quoted "Bud" Wheaton, who makes this observation:

> ...some of these are "hard core" cases which have resisted, often with the aid of highly placed and influential politicians, all well-founded movements to effect centralization. (Example: east end of Suffolk County--BOCES I.) In such instances an alternative approach is needed so that children residing therein are not denied broader quality educational services.[17]

Some come down rather hard on the present District Superintendents for failing to provide appropriate leadership. One former Albany-Schoharie District Superintendent feels there is now no one leading the way in many

areas of the state and that many superintendents and their boards have no idea what incentive aid is available. He recommends:

> The state must push the District Super-intendents to identify possible consolid-ations and meet with superintendents and boards to discuss educational advantages and financial incentives.[18]

Retiree Wright Johnson feels there must be leadership from the District Superintendents to bring about feasibility studies and that these must include the possible role of BOCES in the resulting reorganization, because such moves are dictated by "changing economy and declining enrollments, together with an expanding and changing curriculum."[19]

The 1954 Health, Education and Welfare study[20] on centralization called for each state to create a commission or committee completely separate from existing agencies to avoid all entrenched interests. Several District Superintendents endorse this idea but many others feel commissions have been a waste of time and money.

One District Superintendent, who prefers not to be quoted by name, says:

> My own personal feeling, that I don't say very loudly in X county, is that we run a pretty inefficient school system with 11 superintendents, 11 business offices, 11 transportation systems, 11 cafeteria systems for a very small total number of pupils...with over 700 school districts in New York, we will never have "Equal Educational Opportunity for All."[21]

Retiree Richard (Dix) McDonald expresses this pragmatic view:

> As long as the State keeps costly and inefficient schools in existence by the present aid formulas, reorganizations, despite incentives, are not going to come easily. Perhaps our legislators should have the courage of their Pennsylvania counterparts! But since that is not a real possibility, the State should focus strongly on a combination of regional/BOCES efforts to give rural kids a better curriculum. There are, after all, many strengths and positive values in a small, rural school. If the instructional program is the weak spot, then fix that and don't worry about forcing something on people.[22]

Several former District Superintendents and State Education Department officials have shared rather detailed plans which they feel should be followed, step-by-step. Three of the best thought out are shared here.

William Phelan, long in the forefront of educational leadership, especially on Long Island, offered these specifics:

> Perhaps it would be well to have our Commissioner arrange for a careful look at each of the BOCES regions...with the complete involvement of leaders in each of these regions. If it is found that there is still a need for reorganization in a BOCES region, it would seem most appropriate to have a Commissioner's committee complete a sound study of the total area. I am mindful of the fact that BOCES regions may not honor county lines in all cases. Special consideration will be needed in these respective areas. The recommendation of the respective committees should be given in-depth attention in the regions studied. Steps must be taken to provide incentives if any further centralization is to become a reality. It's futile to make additional efforts without acutal financial incentives. The Commissioner's committee should look carefully at the present size and enrollment of the very large centralizations as some of our centralizations may be so large that they are unwieldy. The geographical size of some of our districts is causing fantastic transportation time and mileage. Perhaps one of the first steps which should be taken as the State and local districts look at centralization would be the development of some norms concerning geographical size, enrollemnt, tax base, etc. Balances are a must.[23]

Irving Henry served many years as a District Superintendent in two locations. His suggested steps are a bit more philosophic but lean heavily on the needs of children. He says:

1. If there is to be a strong state school system in New York, then the Board of Regents and the Commissioner must exhibit a stronger leadership role than evident in the last decade--as far as school district reorgani-zation is concerned.

2. The Regents have taken a giant step in upgrading education in New York through the Regents Action Plan--no matter how debatable the Plan seemed to be to the field. I believe the action has and will bring about a better quality of education to the people of the state--however, school district reorgani-zation needs similar serious leadership attention to properly implement the plan.

3. If there is a serious quest for a very strong standardized state system--making sure that all people are given the same opportunity and receive the same quality of education, the areas of so-called local control will have to be carefully examined--voting on budgets, signatures on petitions, local voting for merger, etc.

4. As to school districts and how they are organized--New York has their "way" and there are (in other states) many ways of organizing districts--county school systems, regional systems--follow the BOCES boundaries, elementary districts, high school districts.

5. I personally feel for keeping a strong, "close to the people" elementary school system--even if you only have a population large enough for a one-room school!

6. Elementary education (make kindergarten optional) through eighth grade is basic education: not sure of need for industrial arts, homemaking and all the extras at this level!

7. Need for regional high schools operated within the framework of a BOCES![24]

The long-time supervisor and then chief of the department which supervised reorganization was John H. Bishop, now retired to South Carolina where he has had lots of time to think about what should be done. Here are his suggestions:

1. Develop criteria for "necessary" districts. Colorado has a version based on transport-ation time, projected low enrollments and limited resources; support these for a minimum program of services K-12.

2. Try to develop performance or service criteria which would lead "feasible" contributions (of 1000 K-12 or less) to mandatory 6-12 (or 7-12 reorganizations if correction of deficiences cannot be achieved with available resources; support 100% of extra transportation and required facility changes for these combinations.

3. All districts should be in some formal K-12 arrangement--no tuition shopping from year to year.[25]

One present District Superintendent published in 1981 a 22-page article about his ideas on reorganization. Burton Ramer of Oswego County, in his provocative article "School District Reorganization: Evolution or Revolution?," states:

> I am sure there are many who felt (in reorganization) the school districts were being pushed too fast and too far. But in truth, it was too slow and not far enough; and the great majority of school districts in New York State are still too small to adequately function in our present society. Their size, or rather lack of it, inhibits the school's flexibility to solve the difficult problems they currently face; and this weakness will become even more pronounced as we approach the 21st centry.... Continuing

> such a school system is a luxury we cannot afford and is difficult to justify.[26]

These ringing words lead to Ramer's proposal that we reorganize New York schools into 44 school districts, one for each BOCES plus New York City.

Education in rural America is back on the priority agenda in many states; even the Federal Government has shown recent interest in spending more money and attention on rural schools. in 1983, the Secretary of Education, T.H. Bell, issued a personal declaration of intention to reorder the U.S. Department of Education's focus in a paper titled Rural Education and Rural Family Education Policy for the'80s.[27]

While it contains no direct call for reorganization of school districts, there is much rhetoric about strengthening rural schools, equal educational opportunity, educating for an "increasingly complex workforce," etc., all of which are basic claims made by advocates of further district reorganization.

In New York State, the Rural Schools Program in six years has become a very potent force for rural school improvement. Almost all small/rural districts have voluntarily joined forces with this Cornell University-based effort to improve our schools.

Another noteworthy effort is that produced in 1985 by the New York State Legislative Commission on Rural Resources. One of the commission's publications focuses on education in rural New York.

Their conclusions even-handedly recite the two-sided controversy surrounding school district reorganization- consolidation.

> There will be a continuing number of "necessarily small school districts" in the foreseeable future.
>
> Continued consolidation/centralization of school districts will occur.[28]

The above are cited as two of the future trends in this report.

Under "Public Policy Questions to be Addressed" later in the report, such balanced treatment continues:

> Two types of consolidation/centralization need to be distinguished in policy issues:
>
> -- school district service pooling or BOCES academic services (functional)
>
> -- school district (physical)[29]

Notes

1. Op cit, HEW 1954 Yearbook, pp. 263-4.

2. Conversation with anonymous District Superintendent, September 1985.

3. Notes of conversation with Assistant Commissioner Francis Griffin, circa 1978.

4. Survey form, Hugh W. Vanderhof, January 1985.

5. Survey form, John L. Saxton, January 1985.

6. Survey form, Philip Peters, 1985.

7. Survey form, Leo A. Soucy, January 1985.

8. Survey form, Herford A. Smith, December, 1984.

9. Survey form, George Maybury, January 1985.

10. Survey form, Charles H. Bohlen, Jr., January 1985.

11. Survey form, Robert W. Sekowski, February 1985.

12. Survey form, John W. Harrold, January 1985.

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VIII. WHAT SHOULD THE FUTURE BE?

In January 1985, all current District Superintendents and retired Superintendents were asked what they thought should happen in the future regarding school district reorganization.

Their responses were entirely free--there was no listing of possibilities to check, for example. No doubt many more people would agree with the various suggestions but the research team felt it best not to prompt anyone.

Almost 90% of the living retired District Superintendents responded. Several surveys were mailed to people who had recently passed away and responses were received from another member of the family, but we did not count their frequently interesting answers.

Here is the summary of the District Superintendents' open-ended responses.

RETIRED DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS (62 RESPONSES)
WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN IN THE FUTURE REGARDING REORGANIZATION?

16 - More reorganizations are necessary

9 - Mandates for reorganization of small districts

8 - More incentives provided for reorganization

7 - Regional high schools, retaining local elementary

7 - BOCES should operate high schools for groups of small districts

3 - Eliminate all districts that do not operate high schools

3 - County system works in other states - what about here? (or BOCES regions)

2 - Reduce or eliminate aid for very small districts

2 - Pennsylvania-type mandate to reorganize by certain date or State does it for you

2 - All districts should conduct school feasibility studies, disregarding present BOCES assignment

2 - State use penalties to force reorganization

1 - EACH OF THE FOLLOWING

- Set future date by which every district must meet recommended educational standards or else reorganization will be ordered

- Albany and District Superintendents decide together which districts are too small to operate efficiently; SED reduces or eliminates aid for those judged inefficient

- RAP (Regents Action Plan) will force many reorganizations

- BOCES districts are getting too large, leading to District Superintendents being seen only as a state employee; dual role of District Superintendent must be maintained

- Forget the Master Plan and reorganize districts by common sense, with only criteria being 100 graduates and contiguous territory

- District Superintendents should take a larger role; some have not even explained new incentives law to superintendents and boards

- State should push District Superintendents to identify needed consolidations and to meet with superintendents and boards to discuss financial and educational advantages

- Centralization should be a legislative responsibility, not an administrative/electorate persuasion

- Should avoid too large reorganizations

- Study of secondary schools should be made state-wide, including BOCES, with recommendations for what should happen

- May need a CCC-type program (BOCES operated?)

- Combine districts for administrative purposes but keep high schools where they are

- Provide 20% incentive aid for 10 years

- Have state-wide study of how to strengthen BOCES, also, partly as an example for local districts

- Board of Regents and Commissioner must exhibit stronger leadership role in reorganization

- Political solution will win over educational solution--local sentiment will prevail

- People want local control, local identity, and control of their destinies, even if it costs a lot more

- Must strengthen state system of education, including a study of the effects and results of local control

- Keep strong local elementary school (K-8 or 1-8), even one-room school, with larger high school arrangement (Regional or BOCES); eliminate requirements for industrial arts, home economics, etc., in grades 7-8 to accomplish

- Forget reorganization and focus on regional (BOCES?) efforts for improved secondary education

- Districts which remain small from choice should receive financial aid only if they demonstrate ability to provide satisfactory programs for students

- Sharing of services through BOCES by neighboring districts should be encouraged by fiscal incentives as alternatives to reorganization

- The Commissioner should require each BOCES to take a careful look, using an appointed committee, at education in the area, with recommendations made for local studies

- Individual high schools should be maintained (to preserve loyalties and sports) but have BOCES serve special needs in academic areas

- Legislation should provide job security for all personnel in the event of a merger

- Commissioner appoints county committees to study schools, including BOCES--recommendations to be made

- Have not seen research that proves bigger is better

- Have several high schools per county (2-3), maintaining local elementary schools; use existing high schools where possible

- Reorganization is a local matter, not state

(Some suggested several ideas.)

Most current District Superintendents also responded, although not at as much length!

CURRENT DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS (30 RESPONSES)
WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN IN FUTURE REGARDING REORGANIZATION?

9 - Regional high schools should be established

7 - Need state mandate of some sort

7 - Need more money for incentive aid

4 - Other alternatives to reorganization need to be studied

3 - Need more mergers, where feasible

3 - BOCES should offer high school program for small schools

3 - Need state money pool to pay for reorganization studies

2 - Need state aid for alternatives studies

2 - Need new master plan, including BOCES studies

2 - Sharing programs and services without full merger provided as acceptable

2 - Sports remain more important than academics, thus reorganization difficult

2 - Let's reorganize (merge) some BOCES as a model for districts

1 - EACH OF THE FOLLOWING

- Not much will happen until costs are exorbitant
- Need full study of how secondary education is delivered to small districts
- Let's encourage larger high schools in each region to take in other students
- Little progress while State gives construction aid to small districts
- If State isn't going to encourage reorganization, let BOCES have free hand to develop instructional programs
- Let each BOCES area develop a fine arts high school, a math/science high school, etc.
- State should insist on adequate academic standards in approving consolidations
- The impossible--mandates based on educational, geographical and sociological criteria
- If small school can support itself, reorganization may not be defensible
- RAP (Regents Action Plan) demands reorganization of the smaller districts

- Let's admit it, we have too many districts and highly inefficient ones

- Have no Equal Educational Opportunity with so many small districts

- SED just won't provide the leadership

- Change law to permit merger of existing boards after consolidation

- Propose having 44 districts, one each BOCES plus NYC

- SED should encourage more sharing

- SED should provide incentives for studies (money and personnel)

- I oppose all mergers

- Districts under 400 should be offered a year to try out any alternative

- SED and District Superintendents must take pro- active role

- Not much will happen without State muscle and improved incentive aid

- Should encourage extended engagement period with some incentive aid before trying full-scale reorganization

(Some suggested several possibilities.)

The research committee for this study considered seriously whether we should follow-up with a more specific survey form. Finally we mailed such a form in January 1986 and received 71 responses, 44 from retired and 27 from active Districts Superintendents.

The results were as follows, reported as totals since there was very little difference between the two groups:

1. Do you favor any mandates on school district reorganization?

   Yes - 58 No - 11? - 2

2. If so which would you favor?(check as many as you wish)

   a. Eliminate all common school districts (yes - 39)

b. Establish a date by which small districts must reorganize as they choose or the State will order their consolidation (yes-39)

c. Eliminate all districts not having 1-12 programs (yes - 35)

d. Require a reorganization feasibility study whenever the chief school officer leaves office in a dependent district (yes-21)

e. Establish regional high schools for districts which graduate fewer than 100 pupils (yes - 19)

f. Eliminate all districts under 500 enrollment (yes - 18)

g. Eliminate all union free school districts (yes - 13)

h. Establish 44 school districts coterminous with BOCES boundaries (yes - 10)

i. Establish county units by some future date (yes - 7)

j. Eliminate all districts under 1000 enrollment (yes - 6)

k. Eliminate all districts under 1500 enrollment (yes - 4)

3. Which incentives do you favor? (check as many as you wish)

a. Increased incentive aid for newly reorganized districts (46)

b. Link incentive aid to district's fiscal capacity so poorer districts are eligible for more incentive aid (40)

c. Establish a State fund to absorb differences between uneven levels of debt and costs of deferred maintenance in districts that agree to reorganize (32)

d. Provide incentive aid for regionalized high schools (30)

e. Broaden reorganization incentive aid so that districts sharing programs can qualify (27)

f. Provide permanent incentive aid for newly reorganized districts (19)

4. Which penalties do you favor?

a. Establishment of a future date for termination of aid to very small districts (36)

b. Reduction or elimination of aid for districts without a high school (21)

c. Reduction or elimination of aid for districts under 100 annual graduates (9)

5. Do you favor increased aid for "necessarily" small district?

Yes - 44 No - 21? - 6

6. If yes, what should count as a "necessarily" small district?

a. Bus rides too long (42)
(usual maximum favored--45-60 minutes each way; some said over 10 miles)

b. Significant geographic barriers (23)
(mountains and lakes)

c. Surrounded by neighbors who refuse to reorganize (7)

7. Do you believe changes are necessary in procedures governing reorganization?

Yes - 41 No - 22? - 8

8. If so, which do you endorse?

a. Transition school board of all existing board members (33)

b. Make it possible for reorganization referendums to bind the short term actions of the new board (22)

c. Count votes separately in each district (11)

d. Raise the plurality required before a reorganization plan is accepted (4)

Some individual comments are worthy of special consideration. Almost everyone said they <u>generally</u> did not favor mandates but defended their favorable position on this issue in these ways:

> In most of NYS the reason there are districts with too few pupils is generally a misdirected local pride or a tax advantage (rarely). The <u>children</u> in those districts are entitled to educational advantages the same as other children regardless of their <u>parents'</u> misdirection.
>
> Yes, I favor mandates here, reluctantly; I hate to see them but that pain is not as great as the one caused by the knowledge that irreparable harm is being done in

districts with inadequate programs. Okay, so inadequate districts are not all small--but many are.

I believe that the present procedures will produce few, if any reorganized districts. The brutal fact exists that only legislative mandate will do the job.

Having been a superintendent in a district with 350 students, another with 1000 students and one with several thousand, I am convinced a 1000 pupil district is necessary to at least begin to offer programs for all students. Less than that, you must cut corners and cheat students.

The State of New York must mandate reorganization and equity in the name of fiscal responsibility and equity in educational opportunity for all students. A specific date should be set by the legislature--and soon.

The State Legislature should do their part in bringing about reorganization. They seem to be afraid of the politics involved in making it mandatory.

Pennsylvania set up their area schools by state mandate and it has seemingly worked out well. New York took the other route, starting with the will of the people which was supposed to ensure local interest and support. Apparently local control has its weaknesses or we wouldn't be faced with the problem of too many small central districts at this later date.

The opponents of mandates generally were vocal in their opposition.

I'm afraid I am way over "in left field" when it comes to mandates! The few but striking instances of what mandates can do in our native state (Pennsylvania)..."turn me off." If one must choose, basically I favor the New York pattern where the type and quality of education is largely in the hands of local boards within guidelines and minimums established by the state.

Offhand I do not favor mandates. Any mandates you make will find areas that defy solution at that time....I feel that district reorganization is a continuing study. Mandating centralization will not solve the problem....The township law used in 1917 showed that direct mandatory centralization was not feasible. The people have to want it.

Opposed to mandates but eliminate all districts which are simply tax shelters.

> The system in place has been excellent over the years. Instead (of mandates) give more incentive aid--remove flat grants to small districts. I favor doing away with flat grants over a period of years in all districst.
>
> I believe that efforts to reorganize should be promoted by local persons and not mandated by state officials. I do not favor continuing to pay a fixed state-aid to districts and thereby allowing them to continue to exist when they should be reorganized.

So much for comments on the controversial issue of mandates. Other comments should also be noted.

> Another factor (in the problem) is the fact that there are two types of men and women who serve on School Boards without pay. One type is the altruistic person who serves without any selfish motive and whose main objective is to improve the program of the school. The other type is that person who has power and likes power and doesn't always put the needs of pupils first. He or she can be tempted to keep the status quo for a variety of reasons even including protection of friends or relatives who work for the school district. This was true in one-teacher school districts. Human nature hasn't changed.
>
> At least part of the problem in NYS lies with our inability (or unwillingness) to tackle the issue of wealth disparity. A uniform tax rate on true value--supplemented by additional state aid in poor districts with "recapture" features in the wealthy districts--would certainly tend to equalize both cost and quality. We also need to incorporate "sunset" dimension in ad hoc aid --such as "save harmless" and "flat grant!"
>
> Simply put, New York can't afford 750 superintendents and 750 boards. We need some kind of plan of fiscal "affordance" soon.
>
> Ultimately (in rural areas) I can see an Educational Park consisting of a Regional High School, an Occ Ed Center and, where population justifies, a Community College, with such coordinative efforts that any student could individualize his or her program by moving from one to the other at any time.

Pleas for stronger leadership at all levels were common. One active District Superintendent felt that present chief school officers are reluctant to take a stance on reorganization because they are at the whim of their boards on contract renewal. He recommended a return to the stipulation that

such dismissal can only be made with the District Superintendent's approval. This, he felt, would bring stronger leadership for reorganization from many superintendents.

One response called for an extended consideration of the possibility of mandates.

> The Commissioner should put the cards on the table at his series of fall conferences around the state. If I were in his shoes, that's what I would do--thus letting people know what was coming soon--a firm recommenda-tion for mandates to eliminate inadequate districts. This would give people time to do themselves what they should.

Other answers had specific suggestions:

> Make provisions for broad discretionary power for the Commissioner, with the consent of a Board of Review (permanent) made up of a cross section of groups familiar with the educational structure of the state.
>
> Let the present staff in School District Organization check COSER's. Hire some new, intelligent people to work with the districts, and provide the time and resources to do the job right.

Out of this mass of educated but sometimes contradictory opinion, can conclusions be reached about future directions? Is there any reasonable consensus which can be said to be "expert" opinion? The author feels there are slightly qualified "yes" answers for both in some areas and resoundingly positive answers in others. These are as follows:

<u>100% OR NEAR AGREEMENT</u>

1. Equality of opportunity has not nearly been reached in New York State, partly because of the spotty success in achieving needed centralizations.

2. With the demands imposed by the Regents Action Plan and the ever-increasing needs based on our complex society, necessary steps toward school improvement can't wait generation after generation.

3. One of the essential steps toward school improvement is continuing reorganization of educationally and/or fiscally weak units.

4. The State should make long term financial assistance committment toward districts which result from reorganization, considerably more so than at present.

5. There is a continuing need for strong and enlightened leadership at all levels, including legislative, executive, State Education Department, District Superintendents, local administration and Board of Education.

6. More acceptable options should be approvable; more flexibility is needed.

7. Reasonable and workable alternatives to physical reorganization should be encouraged wherever they are shown to serve the best interests of children and are fiscally defensible. Sharing can solve many problems of a weak program.

MAJORITY SUPPORT

1. Legislative action should be taken to eliminate the grossly inadequate and/or inefficient districts which have no justifiable reason for existence.

2. "Local control" can be used to defend any type of inadequacy, but the needs of children are too important for indefensible interpre-tations. This type of defense is similar to the initial opposition to Salk vaccine, seat belts, etc. Educational standards must be established and maintained.

3. Approval of appropriate high school arrange-ments should be encouraged in areas where that seems acceptable to the people.

4. BOCES flexibility must be expanded so that it can be the lively vehicle which its potential promised.

5. Petty leadership jealousies have sometimes been an enemy of school improvement. Attention should be given to this problem.

6. A sensible and defensible definition of "inadequate" should be undertaken.

7. A responsible determination should be made of which districts will remain "necessarily small" because of geography.

8. Wherever possible districts should graduate 100 or more annually or they are too small.

SYNTHESIS OF THE DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS' RECOMMENDATIONS

Careful consideration has been given to all the foregoing and hundreds of other opinions expressed by those quoted and many others. The following sequential steps are offered as appropriate recommendations in the ongoing development of a strong school organizational plan for New York State.

1. Conduct a thorough study of the existing BOCES's to determine whether further consolidation of these units is appropriate. This is essential because the BOCES will play an ever-increasingly important role in meeting the needs of the youth of our state.

2. A balanced committee of representatives from the State and field organizations should be assigned to develop realistic standards for:

    a. Necessarily small districts because of geography and/or distance

    b. Size (maximum and minimum)

    c. Curricular offerings

    d. Tax base

    e. Achievement levels

3. The Commissioner should appoint a representative commission in each BOCES region to serve as his representatives in completing a careful study of school organization and success in all districts of the region.

4. The Legislature and/or Commissioner should set a date sufficiently in the future by which recommended reorganizations of small districts have been completed or acceptable alternative sharing arrangements have been established, either through BOCES or on another sound basis.

5. The BOCES regional commissions should have a date by which their recommendations are to be completed. Such recommendations will include desirable organizational and operational groupings of existing districts based on the standards of adequacy, coupled with common sense. It is anticipated that many, probably most, districts will remain "as is."

6. A legal hearing procedure should be specially established to deal promptly with appeals resulting from any recommended changes. This procedure must provide a sufficient number of panels to handle appeals promptly.

7. Appropriate penalties should be considered for any district which has not moved adequately to correct its deficiencies by the date established, plus reasonable appeal time, unless the appeal grants other relief. Such penalties may take the form of reduction or elimination of state aid, orders to correct inadequacies, and/or enforced reorganization.

8. Necessarily small districts should receive special continuing aid to ensure the maintenance of an adequate educational program.

These recommendations attempt to accomodate the unusual characteristics of New York State's make-up, including the strong feelings of local control common in every community. However, there comes a time when stronger measures should be taken to ensure decent opportunities for rural children. We have accepted standards for highway and automobile safety; pure food and drug standards; restaurant cleanliness and refrigeration; hospital services and staffing standards; immunization of our children and animals; air, water and noise pollution standards; fish and game regulations. We have determined what constitutes sexual and child abuse; identified obscenity, murder and how many fouls a player gets before he or she is evicted from a game.

Can we accept all those things, and thousands of others, without taking measures, other than the elapse of time, in the interest of our children? It was 50 years ago that the Commissioner of Education in New Jersey, C.N. Kendall, said:

> The consolidated school is an instrument of great power in helping the young people in rural communities to realize themselves.[1]

Amen, brother Kendall, and 50 years is enough!

In our state, the Committee of 21 in 1923 concluded as follows in their volume on Administration and Supervision:

> We believe that every child and every community should have access to a comprehensive program of educational opportunity. We believe that control and responsibility should be kept as close to the people as possible without interfering with effective operation. We believe in the community school. But we believe that most community schools (in rural areas) will not be able to provide the comprehensive program of opportunity desired...[2]

Are those feelings appropriate nearly two-thirds of a century later? Were they prophets before their time--or revolutionaries who should have been treated as false prophets at best?

The Regents or legislators of that time would never have <u>dreamed</u> of even legislating A. Delos Goodrich's rope swings, let alone Hiram Goodrich's in-

door toilets. The times just may have changed. If we expect so much more of our schools, and we do, can we anticipate the needed improvements without providing the necessary tools and adequate vehicles in which to transport them?

This is not a call to reorganize every school district in the State. That would be complete folly. It is a dual plan for the implementation of:

1. Adequate standards for small/rural schools.

2. Acceptance of the fact that we need a pragmatic approach which agrees there are numerous ways to provide for those standards, and local districts are free to develop acceptable methods to achieve those goals. They are no longer free to deny decent education for all their young people. Our young people. Tomorrow's leaders.

Notes

1. Kendall, C.N., Improvement of Rural Schools by Means of Consolidation, State of New Jersey: Trenton, July 1916.

2. Works, George A., "The Community Unit," Rural School Survey of New York State: Administration and Supervision, Joint Committee on Rural Schools: Ithaca, 1923, pp.218-9.

IX. IMPORTANT DATES
IN DEVELOPMENT OF REORGANIZATION
IN NEW YORK STATE

1912	Establishment of office of District Superintendent--28 given leadership role in reorganization
1914	Central Rural School Law adopted
1915	First Central Rural District formed--Youngsville Central
1916	Chazy Consolidated Rural District formed--never recognized as Central District (used wrong law)
1917	Township Law adopted--establishing town center as logical district (similar to all New England states)
1918	Township Law repealed--very unpopular in New York State
1920	Farmers Week at Cornell--led to establishment of Committee of 21
1921-2	Rural School Survey of New York--by Committee of 21
1924	Concept of Equalization developed at Columbia University
1925	Central School Law amended to include Equalization-- provided extra aid for Central Districts
1927	Central Rural Schoolboards Association organized
1932	District Superintendents first required to submit long-range centralization plans to Commissioner
1935	Federal Government decided PWA school construction grants would go only to Central Districts
1938	Regents Inquiry into Character and Costs of Public Education--recommended statewide regional commissions on reorganization--not enacted into law but had great effect
1940's	Joint Legislative Commission--studies of Rapp Commission led to creation of Master Plan for School District Reorganization
1944	Central High School Districts no longer to be organized
1947	Master Plan adopted
1948	Intermediate District Law passed (never implemented)

1948-52	Educational Planning by Neighborhoods in Centralized Districts Project, Public Relations for Centralization and School Improvement, Columbia University
1948	BOCES Law adopted
1949	Central School Study Council organized at Columbia University
1951	First Recentralized District formed--Dryden-Freeville Central and McLean Central Schools merged
1952	Enlarged City District Law passed
1955	Deadline for City Districts to join in creating Central Districts
1956	Heald Commission--recommended revision of Master Plan
1956-8	Legislature ordered revision of Master Plan
1957-9	Advisory Committee Study on Master Plan
1958	State Plan for School District Reorganization adopted (Revised Master Plan)
1962	Diefendorf Formula adopted--prohibited building aid to districts listed for reorganization without Commissioner's approval
1965	Cullen Commission--Commissioner appointed to recommend further changes in Suffolk County part of Master Plan
1972	Ammerman Committee--Commissioner appointed to recommend further changes in Master Plan for Long Island
1972	Repeal of Intermediate District Law (never implemented since 1948 passage) and permanent establishment of BOCES to fill similar role
1980	Central High School District formation reinstated--Suffolk County only
1981	First Central School District dissolved--Grand Gorge Central
1983	Legislature provides big increase in incentive aid for reorganization
1985	State fund created for local reorganization studies

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